

# THE PRIMAL HUNTER

## Chapter 61: A bitter end

Caroline couldn't even scream anymore as the metal spread from her heart until all that remained was a mannequin of iron. The low vitality and toughness of a healer became apparent, as she didn't even have time to struggle before her death.

On the other hand, Richard was dumbfounded along with the still more than 30 elites around him. What the fuck was going on?

"Always the healer first," William said, his voice cold, "And then you do the adds, followed by the big boss."

With those words, metal slid up and covered his face, not even leaving any holes for air to seep through.

His spear was still stuck in Caroline's corpse of metal as the two warriors closest to him made their move.

The first one swung down a massive heavy sword, aiming for the hand that held the spear. William didn't even bother to dodge as the man hit his lower arm.

To the surprise of everyone but William, the arms didn't even move. Instead, the warrior felt the impact reverberate up his arms, causing him to grunt in pain. The ground below William did sink in slightly, but otherwise, he didn't really feel the blow very much.

Counteracting the force using metal manipulation on his armor was simplicity itself, while the enchantments Herrmann had placed on the armor nullified much of the impact. Along with that, William didn't exactly rate the man very highly.

The other warrior simply stabbed towards William's back, his blade not finding any purchase either as it encountered the impenetrable armor.

"Boring," a distorted voice sounded out from within the golem-like body.

Taking his spear out in a far faster motion than any of the warriors were capable of, he swung it to one side, slicing up the chest of the one with the heavy sword, while four blades seemed to emerge from the armor as they stabbed through another.

Instantly two warriors fell as Richard started to realize the gravity of the situation.

"FORMATION!" he yelled as they all shrugged off their groggy states and all retreated away from the metal caster.

The casters on Richard's side began to condense spells, as the two archers that remained began to each channel a Powershot.

Not that William planned on letting them fire it, as more weapons emerged from his armor.

William didn't have any spatial storage but instead used the Legacy of Herrmann Schmidt to summon his armory. It was akin to spatial storage in some ways, but in other ways, it wasn't. The weapons didn't physically exist but were constructed in real-time by the skill as he used them.

It allowed William to summon creations of the late smith. Swords, axes, spears, daggers, all sorts of weapons, and some pieces of armor. Though the young caster didn't need that part of the ability, as he was more than fine when it came to his defenses.

It did cost him mana to create these weapons, but it was nothing compared to using his other metal-creation skill.

These weapons were now flying out one by one from his body as he focused his mind on controlling them. When he had first gotten the skill Metal Manipulation, he could manage only a few daggers. It rapidly progressed from three to four to five, and so on and so forth.

Now, more than twenty weapons that were far bigger than a dagger flew around him with erratic movements. Like a school of fish, they bombarded the poor warriors, who could only scream and run as the nearly two dozen weapons chased them down pointy-end first.

Seeing that this couldn't go on, Richard charged towards William as he released a shockwave of force. While the young caster's armor gave him incredible defenses, it did have its limits as he was blasted backward, momentarily losing control of some of the flying weapons.

However, he quickly stabilized himself as he raised his spear and met Richard's glowing sword with it. A mighty clash of caster and warrior ended as one would expect, with William pushed back, forced to retreat as a red gleam started enveloping Richard.

His blows got faster, as William was forced to retreat as he started feeling a bit dizzy from the impacts. It was like he was stuck inside a giant bell as the man hammered it with his sword. Without the enchantments, William would, without a doubt, be spitting out blood from internal injuries by now.

As he retreated by sliding backward, he didn't get far as a Powershot hit him in the chest, making him nearly fall over from the impact. The arrow naturally disintegrated as it hit the armor, but it did leave a slight dent and scratch where it had hit.

The archer himself wasn't in a much better state as his arm looked decrepit and weak. He looked in an even worse shape after more than twenty swords pinned his body to the ground after he was too weak to dodge.

William, wasting no time, slid forward as he simply manipulated his body to smash into Richard, who didn't manage to raise his shield in time. The spear struck down again and again but was reflected every time.

The spear he used was, of course, the epic-rarity skill Spear of Ferroras. It raised his physical stats significantly while wielding it, and the powerful curse placed upon it only made the weapon all the deadlier.

But while it could turn anyone it hit into metal, it only worked on living things, which meant that William had to penetrate flesh to activate it. Something Richard currently hadn't allowed him to do, as he either dodged or blocked every blow.

Neither of them was agility-focused in any way, but their speed was nevertheless impressive even to most light-warriors only due to the stats both men possessed.

But while they seemed equally matched at first, one had to consider the entire situation. Richard did manage to face him in melee combat, but this was all while William simultaneously focused on the many flying weapons as he suppressed all the other elites around him.

He also had to keep track of all the ranged attacks and the warriors who managed to approach him. While he could shrug off most attacks, some of them were genuinely troublesome - the most troublesome one which was to come.

A torrent of flame exploded from the side as William dodged backward frantically. Another flood soon followed as a caster who seemed himself to be on fire approached him.

William recognized the kind of skill the man used. A sacrificial spell not unlike what Herrmann had done to finish his armor. In return for consuming your life source, the skill allowed you to display power far above the usual.

The man was a candle flickering in the wind, as he with a yell, fired a torrent of flame behind him, propelling towards William. With a fright, the metal manipulator tried to get away but was blocked by Richard, who once again had raised his shield and erected the giant blue barrier to block him off.

With an explosion, the burning caster detonated himself like a living bomb, with William only barely managing to summon his trusty Wall of Iron in front of him to take the worst off the blow.

Heat washed over him as he was cooked within his armor. While the armor provided exceptional defense towards physical attacks, it was far from good against elemental ones. The pain was unbearable as he felt his arms and chest heat up and blister as he blocked the torrent of fire as the man slowly burned out.

Finally, every last piece of energy dispersed from the man as the flames died out. Not a single trace of the caster remained, save for the vast area of burned forest in the shape of a crescent moon as one side had been blocked off entirely by Richard.

The smoking armor was unmoving as Richard retracted his shield with a deep breath. His stamina was getting dangerously low after the fight with Desmond, as well as the blow he had just blocked.

The flying blades had dropped to the ground as they slowly started turning to mana once more as they dispersed. The Spear of Ferroras was also nowhere to be found, as it too had been dispelled. A total of eight people and one unmoving suit of armor remained in the clearing of ash.

An archer, two casters, and five warriors were all that remained. Not a single one of them unscathed, the wounds they had suffered after the fight with Desmond had only worsened. One of the warriors even missed an arm as William had managed to cut it off with one of his flying swords.

Despite the slight reprieve, none of them relaxed. No notification had been received which meant that the monster that dwelled within the smoking armor still lived.

Suddenly everything felt like something was wrong. Very wrong. The caster was the first one to notice as he exclaimed: “Watch out! He is doing something with the mana!”

At the exact same time, a figure came out of nothing. A man with only a single arm and a rapier flew past everyone as its tip found purchase in the man standing in the middle.

Richard groaned as he felt the thin blade penetrate him from behind, but he managed to twist his body and avoid getting hit in the heart. In the same motions, he turned and, with a swift cleave, beheaded the rapier-wielding warrior.

Which was the moment William’s final attack arrived.

**“Vortex of Steel.”**

The distorted voice sounded out from within the armor as the ground started shaking. Small shards of unprocessed metal started slowly rising up from the earth and gathered towards William. Followed by all other metal in the surroundings.

One had to remember exactly where they were. On a battlefield with dozens of bodies all within a few hundred meters. All of them with the equipment they had worn still on. Equipment that now lay unclaimed as their owners had died.

A armor, still with corpses in them, started flying towards the eye of the vortex - weapons, arrows, everything. This was soon followed by other tools and articles of metal. Every piece that remained within Hayden and Desmond's former base was now being sucked towards the youth as the concentration of metal around him only increased.

Even the hinges from the blown off gate found their way towards him. An unlucky warrior also started getting sucked in as he was impacted by an object, followed by another, some of them sticking to him.

Richard could only gape with his mouth wide open as the twister appeared before him.

**“Disperse,”** The voice sounded out once more.

The metal exploded out from the twister as it started expanding in scale. It carved a path through the forest, cutting up and even felling a few of the smaller trees. The storm of metal and corpses all hit the survivors as they were blasted apart.



One of them got hit by a nail in his eye, but before he could react, half a quiver worth of arrows smashed into his unprotected side. He only managed to get a single scream out before the torso of what had once been a heavy warrior collided with his head with the velocity of a speeding car, knocking him out instantly. More and more random things slowly tore him apart until he too joined the vortex as yet another object to hit his former comrades.

The storm was brief but effective as it slowly died down.

Only two living beings remained within hundreds of meters of the vortex's epicenter: the one who had summoned it and Richard. The warrior who had with all his might managed to hang onto his life, if only barely.

He was lying in a pile of battered armor and weapons as he breathed heavily. Both his arms and one of his legs were completely twisted, with his shield and sword nowhere to be found - a horrendous wound seeping out blood from where the warrior stabbed him just moments earlier.

The kneeling figure encompassed in the steel-looking armor slowly got up as the armor started retracting back into a breastplate.

What was revealed was a monstrous appearance, as every area of his body had suffered severe burns. Not a single spec of hair remained, and vast parts of his skin and flesh seemed to have melted away. But he lived.

Levitating, the corpse-like caster floated closer to Richard as the warrior listlessly looked up at the young man. He had been stupid... too stupid. The dog was too mad and had somehow managed to get far more powerful than he could ever believe...

Today was meant to be the day he solidified his position as the number one survivor in the tutorial. The day he became the rightful leader. He had so many plans, so many ambitions. He could have become so much...

"...Why?" he managed to get out with a hoarse voice that seemed to wheeze out at the end. It seems like one of his lungs had given out. He didn't have long left as he looked down and saw several sharp objects sticking out of his chest.

Yet he wanted to know. He had offered benefits, the illusion of a partnership. What was the mistake that led to this misunderstanding? In his own arrogance, even in his final moments, he didn't understand.

William answered with a voice even more horrific sounding than Richard's own.

"It was...inevitable. This outcome was always what was meant to happen. What I had planned," William began, as he struggled to get through the words. It was painful... but his pride and desire to gloat and get his message across overpowered that pain.

"You were a pawn all along. I used you as you wanted to use me and everyone else," William gasped out.

He laughed as he looked at the unmoving man, not even noticing that his eyes had already closed.

“But worst of all, you killed Herrmann! Herrmann was my friend, and you killed him! He is the one who made this armor, you know? Who made this all possible! We beat you together!”

His laughter only got louder as his voice started cracking.

“We got our revenge on all you fuckers! And after this, I will return and kill the rest of your herd of sheep! I will pile up their corpses as a tribute to Herrmann, show him that we did it! That we won!

“And then I will chase down that bastard archer and get my own revenge on him too! I will be the only one left in this shithole and show the system that I am indeed the best! That I am superior to every single fucking one of you...”

At this point, his voice barely came out as a whisper. Two small streams of water had managed to pour down from his eyes despite the burns.

Richard had already died. William knew it, but he didn't care.

William kept rambling on until his voice no longer came out. As his voice ran out of energy, so did the rest of his body as he collapsed on the ash-covered ground. Tears kept streaming down his cheeks as he looked towards the artificial sun that shone in the fake sky. His final thought as he passed out was of Herrmann, and how he had finally fulfilled his promise... and of how much emotions sucked.

William didn't know that this sudden influx of emotions he had never experienced before was of his own doing. Jake was perhaps the one with the most knowledge of the system due to the vast library in the challenge dungeon, and if William had read it, he too would be aware.

Evolution was guided by your Records, by your desires, goals, and dreams. William had wished to understand emotions... wanted to comprehend why people like Casper would prefer death over life due to such strong feelings, and how it could even allow him to grasp for such power.

He felt like he *needed to* understand why the war had turned as brutal as it did. He had wished to comprehend emotions more than anything... and his evolution had delivered. What was broken had been healed by his own desire. The floodgates had been opened to a new world of emotions.

Perhaps it was all a bit too much for the young mind that believed he had everything figured out. He thought himself to be a superior being due to his lack of emotions, but now perhaps these emotions would lead him to more extraordinary things than ever before.

He hadn't known any of this would happen.

But someone did.

A man stepped through nothingness as he, with an eternal smile, fished out a small crystal. Crushing it, tiny motes of energy entered the young caster's body. They did little more than making sure his health points didn't reach zero. He had overreached, and by all accounts, he should die. But the smiling man wouldn't allow that.

"You do not have my permission to die yet, now do you?" he spoke softly.

He could do no more for now. The system wouldn't allow it. Besides, if he went too far... *he* would also get needlessly involved. More so than he already had.

With those thoughts, the figure disappeared once more. Leaving the burnt caster on the ground, with only the small motes of light keeping him alive.

## Chapter 62: Loot 2.0

Jake stared at the number of survivors as it kept going down until it finally stabilized. After twenty minutes, it still hadn't moved, but the number left was still chilling.

**Tutorial Panel**

**Duration: 22 days & 21:49:53**

**Total Survivors Remaining: 49/1200**

More than two hundred people dead.... something extremely major must have happened in the outer area.

He wanted to go back and check... but on the other hand, he didn't. What did he have to go back for? His only friends had betrayed him and even tried to kill him. Maybe they had done it under false pretenses, but they had nevertheless done so.

Jacob seemed like the only one not in on the plan... but Jake still blamed him. It was illogical, he knew that, but it didn't change the fact that he had trusted his former supervisor. His trust had turned into a weakness as Jake had nearly lost his life due to the error - an error he didn't want to repeat.

So Jake ignored it as he closed down the panel. It wasn't any of his business. Not anymore. Instead, he would do what he knew was his business. Getting stronger.

Standing up, he stretched his arms a bit as he confirmed them being fully healed. He decided to head back towards the cliff where he had hunted before being hunted by the small dinosaurs. It was a great vantage point, and he had a sneaking suspicion that something good had to be hidden down in the valley somewhere.

Thinking of this new world with a smudge of videogame-logic hadn't turned out to be that wrong yet. And if an area is closely guarded by many enemies in a videogame, chances are something worthwhile is to be found in that area.

Plus, he had already killed many beasts down there, so it would be a waste to not at least explore the area for herbs and such. He had already found quite a few on the mountainous paths between the valleys, but something more had to be hidden down there.

It took him less time to get back than he expected as he reached the cliff he had been on before after only a quarter of an hour. Turns out that running while not simultaneously fighting beasts was faster.

Standing at the crevice once more, he scanned the area below with Hunter's Sight. He saw several beasts still roaming about, but far less than when he started hunting them.

It was already well-known in the tutorial that the number of beasts was finite, which is why there barely remained any worth hunting in the world outside the barrier to the inner area.

The same rule seemed to hold true here. The beasts also didn't seem to migrate between the different valleys. Perhaps due to the excessive number of dinosaur-like creatures roaming in between said valleys.

Either way, it meant that Jake could, in theory, completely clear out one of these valleys if he had enough time. He didn't plan to do so, but killing the vast majority of them would surely make exploration far safer and faster.

Taking out his bow, he returned to his bread and butter technique of firing blood-soaked arrows with Powershot. But he would spice it up a bit this time.

He still placed his hand around the arrowhead as he let it cut into his palm while he channeled Blood of the Malefic Viper to turn it toxic. Next, he nocked the arrow as he started charging Powershot. But the difference from last time was that he didn't just let the skill do its own thing.

Instead, he closely monitored the flow of inner energy as it traveled throughout his body.

The path it traveled was as he expected, but as it reached his arms and shoulders, he noticed how it spread out in a weird pattern. The energy entered his muscles, but it was as if it did so in a set formation of sorts - a formation he quite honestly couldn't even begin to comprehend.

He felt that he could slightly influence how fast the energy moved, but not with this shot, as he was forced to release the built-up energy.

The arrow exploded out as it hit a few meters away from a badger that rightfully jumped up in fright before running off terrified.

Smirking slightly to himself for missing, he shook his head as he poisoned and nocked another arrow, aiming for another badger in another clearing. This time, he didn't focus intensively on the skill's inner workings but saved enough focus to actually hit his prey.

As predicted, the poor thing didn't even react as it met its end. This hunting method was a bit unsatisfying for Jake's desire to find challenges but very satisfying for the part of him that wanted to get levels fast.



He continued shooting arrows for the next few hours until he stood there for a good five minutes without being able to spot any beasts. He was sure many remained, hidden by trees or bushes, but he must have thinned them out plenty.

The buffalo he had killed the day prior had been the strongest beast in the area as he didn't spot anything even close to it in level and power.

He had gotten two more levels from the grind and decided to put the stat points into agility and strength. He knew the stats' value was lowered as he only had a 10% amplifier on those stats, but he still needed them pretty badly.

His class upgrade did start providing him quite a bit more in those two, so he would likely be able to invest in perception with more of his free points soon.

Bringing up his status menu, he smiled at his progress.

### **Status**

Name: Jake Thayne

Race: [Human (E) – lvl 39]

Class: [Ambitious Hunter – lvl 32]

Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper – lvl 46]

Health Points (HP): 3301/3390

Mana Points (MP): 3985/4070

Stamina: 458/1540

### **Stats**

Strength: 190

Agility: 225

Endurance: 154

Vitality: 339

Toughness: 179

Wisdom: 407

Intelligence: 139

Perception: 342

Willpower: 211

Free points: 0

**Titles:** [Forerunner of the New World], [Bloodline Patriarch], [Holder of a Primordial's True Blessing], [Dungeoneer I], [Dungeon Pioneer I]

**Class Skills:**

[Basic One-Handed Weapon (Inferior), [Basic Stealth (Inferior)], [Advanced Archery (Common)], [Hunter's Sight (Uncommon)], [Powershot (Uncommon)], [Basic Twin Fang Style (Uncommon)], [Basic Shadow Vault of Umbra (Uncommon)], [Splitting Arrow (Uncommon)], [Big Game Hunter (Rare)]

**Profession Skills:** [Herbology (Common)], [Brew Potion (Common)], [Concoct Poison (Common)], [Alchemist's Purification (Common)], [Alchemical Flame (Common)], [Toxicology (Uncommon)], [Cultivate Toxin (Uncommon)], [Malefic Viper's Poison (Rare)], [Palate of the Malefic Viper (Rare)], [Touch of the Malefic Viper (Rare)], [Sense of the Malefic Viper (Rare)], [Blood of the Malefic Viper (Epic)]

**Blessing:** [True Blessing of the Malefic Viper (Blessing - True)]

**Race Skills:** [Endless Tongues of the Myriad Races (Unique)], [Identify (Common)], [Meditate (Common)], [Shroud of the Primordial (Divine)]

**Bloodline:**[Bloodline of the Primal Hunter (Bloodline Ability - Unique)]

His physical stats had soared since he last checked. Something he could also clearly feel as he fought his enemies. His arrows got faster and more powerful, while his movements experienced the same growth.

He had no idea how much he could lift by now, but by the power of just a regular punch, he could likely bench the combined weight of several Olympic wrestlers without breaking a sweat.

Of course, the growth felt a bit weird as he also met stronger and stronger enemies. But if he compared what he could fight now to what he had faced back when first entering the tutorial, it was night and day.

A single one of the small raptors could have ripped the level 10 Stonetusk Boar to pieces in seconds. Meanwhile, Jake had required the help of his colleagues and his entire quiver worth of arrows to take down the beast.

Of course, if Jake himself faced that boar now, he could likely kill it with his bare hands and only a few punches. It was a bit surreal to imagine, but one could only say that the system and his mind did an excellent job adapting him to his rising strength.

Closing down his status menu once again, he took out a stamina potion and chugged it down. His stamina was only at around a fourth of his total, after all. The potions were still relatively weak, but it did give him a few hundred more points. Enough to fight almost anything he could meet below. If not, it would at least allow him to escape.

The drop to the valley below was tens of meters, but Jake didn't bother with a long climb as he simply took a step over the edge and let gravity do the work.

He quickly fell as he landed on the ground, not even having to properly soak the impact as he barely felt the reverberations in his legs, his toughness far too high for a drop like this to do him any harm.

From below, he could see into the forest. From this new vantage point, he did spot a few beasts that had been hidden below the trees' crowns before.

These beasts were all on the weaker side, making Jake not even bother with them. Unless they provoked him, he would just leave them be.

Walking into the forest, he didn't focus as much on his sight as he did his Sphere of Perception. He scanned everything within twenty meters or so as he walked, peeking into every small crevice, every fallen log, and every hollow tree.

After a few minutes, he finally found it.

*Jackpot*, Jake thought to himself as he saw the box within his sphere.

Making his way to it, he flipped over the log that kept it hidden in the small hole in the ground. Identifying it, it was precisely what he had expected to find.

***[Magical Jeweled Lockbox (Uncommon)] – A system-created magical lockbox enchanted with the ability to block off all types of attempts to peek inside before opened***

*Identical to the one with my bracers,*

he thought, as he prepared to open it.

A few seconds later, the box opened with a satisfying click as he saw the item inside.

It was another ring, one with a green gem embedded in it. It wasn't the shiny kind of rock, but the rough kind that didn't reflect any light. Honestly, it was more of a band than a ring, as it didn't have any protrusions but had a perfectly even surface.

Not waiting, he identified it.

***[Ring of the Jade-eye Tiger (Uncommon)] – A ring created by embedding the crystalized eye of a Jade-eye Tiger into a band. The Records of the tiger powers the enchantment, granting some of the beast's might to its user. Enchantments: +20 Perception, +15 Agility, +15 Strength.***

***Requirements: Lvl 30 in any humanoid Race***

With a whistle, Jake picked it up with delight.

By now, he was pretty sure that the system made items specifically for, or at least partly based on, whoever opened the box.

They were like loot-boxes in the gaming industry before the system, but actually good. Instead of getting shit items that nobody had any use for, it deliberately dropped something it judged the user could use.

At least he firmly believed that. Or maybe he had just gotten lucky so far. He based that theory on how all the items he had gained outside the challenge dungeon had been tailor-made for an archer.

He discounted the boxes given in the challenge dungeon as those clearly were made for an alchemist. Which once more made perfect sense as he had just done a dungeon themed around alchemy.

Of course, that didn't mean one could only find useful items. In a lockbox, perhaps, but there were other ways to obtain them. Such as killing other survivors. Jake still had a rare sword in his spatial storage that he was a bit salty about being unable to use.

It didn't mean one got the best item for that moment either. Right now, Jake wanted a quiver or a dagger more than anything else, but he had gotten a ring. A ring that suited him very nicely, but not as good as any of those.

*Oh well, looters can't be choosers*, he joked to himself as he put the ring on his finger, as he felt the warm rush of stats increasing.

The next few hours were spent exploring and looking for that sweet loot.

He did get into a couple of fights here and there, but most of them were settled smoothly and quickly.

His new skill Splitting Arrow turned out to be extremely useful during actual combat. It allowed Jake to practically do the damage of several arrows with only a single shot.



The skill had no wind-up time, and he just had to shoot an arrow precisely the same way he usually did. The only difference was that the arrow would split into several as it was in flight, often taking his opponents by surprise as one attack suddenly turned into several.

Right now, he could easily split it into five arrows. He could do more, but the stamina cost rose significantly with every new arrow added to the split. If splitting the arrow into two required 5 stamina, three required 10, while four required 20, then 35, and so on and so forth.

One thing he did find disappointing, but not surprising, was that his poison wasn't split when he used the skill. It wasn't all bad, though, as even when the arrow split apart into several, one arrow remained the 'true' one.

Whenever he fired a poisoned arrow, it would split, and the other arrows did retain the original's appearance. This meant that they would still have the poison on them if one looked at them, but it didn't actually contain any of the poisonous qualities.

The one 'true' arrow did retain the poison in all its glory and effect. This meant that it worked as a very useful feint where Jake fired several arrows with only one of them being the truly deadly one.

Another way to identify the original arrow was because it was the one that didn't disappear a few minutes after firing. The clones from the split would remain for a few minutes until turning into energy and dispersing into the atmosphere once more.

It had to be said that the conjured arrows from his quiver did the same if left outside the quiver for too long. It did take them a few hours, however, making it barely comparable.

And speaking of the quiver, he was quite excited about the most recent piece of loot he had found.

***[Tutorial equipment upgrade token (Uncommon)] – Upgrade any common-rarity starting item from the tutorial to uncommon-rarity.***

And the token didn't come alone. Jake couldn't hold himself back from making a goofy smile as he looked at the haul in his spatial storage.

It turns out that the unexplored inner area combined with his quite overpowered Sphere of Perception made for quite the combo.

## Chapter 63: Arrows

By now, the entire valley was thoroughly cleaned up. Herbs, lockboxes, even beasts were all gone. It had taken hours, and the sun had gone down quite a while ago, but Jake was more than satisfied. While he had managed to get another level, it was the loot that made him most pleased.

For herbs, he had found a bunch he couldn't recognize at all; however, his Sense of the Malefic Viper told him that they were useful, and using Identify on them confirmed that they were indeed magical herbs. All of them had been inferior or common-rarity except for a bush with berries in the middle of the valley.

***[Soothing Bellberry Bush (Uncommon)] – A bush of Soothing Bellberries. The berries growing on this bush are known to have a soothing effect on the mind.***

He quite frankly wasn't sure if this was something he needed... but he took it anyway. His spatial necklace could allow herbs to survive within it, making it a suitable place to store the bush.

So, he did as any reasonable person would do, aka dug it up and threw it in said storage. He could always find out what to do with it at a later point.

Looking at one of the few berries that had already grown on the bush, he decided to at least give it a bite.

***[Soothing Bellberry (Uncommon)] – A berry that provides a soothing effect to whoever consumes it.***

Even if it somehow turned out to be poisonous, he was confident that his Palate of the Malefic Viper would nullify it. Even if it didn't, he doubted the berry was able to do him much harm.

Popping the thing into this mouth, Jake did feel a cold feeling spread out from his stomach as he became a bit clearer in his head... but otherwise, he didn't really notice anything. Then again, he was already pretty calm currently.

Of course, the bush and other herbs weren't the loot he cared most about. No, it came from the haul he had gotten from a total of five lockboxes, six in total when you counted the one he found the ring in.

Three of common-rarity and two of uncommon-rarity had been found.

The common-rarity ones didn't matter much, but he did find a dagger among them. The others were a pair of boots granting a bit of endurance, which weren't exactly useful considering his rare Boots of the Wandering Alchemist, with the last one being a necklace made similar to the Ring of the Jade-eye Tiger. He put it all in his storage, but overall it was a bit disappointing.

The uncommon-rarity ones were, of course, the token as well as something he could actually use.

***[Shortsword of Icy Winds (Uncommon)] – A Sword made out of Froststeel and amplified with Ice-affinity mana over a long time. Due to the material used, the blade afflicts anyone it hits with the elemental energy of frost. Enchantments: Invading Chill.***

***Requirements: Lvl 35+ in any class.***

Well, he thought he could use it, but it required his class to be level 35... so in two levels. He also didn't know if it worked properly with his Twin Fang Style. It wasn't a weapon made of bone, so that bonus obviously didn't apply, but he also didn't know if it counted as a 'shorter' weapon or not. He felt like it should, considering it was a shortsword and all, but who knows?

And lastly was the aforementioned upgrade token.

***[Tutorial equipment upgrade token (Uncommon)] – Upgrade any common rarity starting item from the tutorial to uncommon rarity.***

This was where the real good stuff was at. Jake had been annoyed at his weak arrows for far too long. They simply broke far too easily, lessening the power of his Powershots by quite a lot, and he often found them unable to penetrate as deeply as he wanted to inflict his poisons better.

Early on, he had learned to increase his bow's durability with mana, making even the inferior-rarity one manageable. After getting the upgraded common-rarity bow from the archer who had been in the party with the Blade of Nature warrior, he hadn't had a single issue with it. At least not for now.

But the arrows couldn't be injected with mana the same way. The mana dispersed more or less instantly upon injecting it. It did the same with the bow, but as he had his hands on it at all times, it didn't really matter. He naturally couldn't do the same with arrows as they would kind of lose their purpose if he started stabbing people with them like daggers. Something, granted, he had done at times.

Looking at his quiver, he reminded himself of the description for one last time.

***[Enchanted Quiver (Common)] – A quiver enchanted with the ability to conjure common-rarity arrows when injected with mana.***

The quiver had served him well, but it was time to upgrade it. Taking the token, he used it on the quiver as light enveloped it for a few moments. Within his sphere, he only saw the quiver be disintegrated to complete nothingness until a new quiver was reassembled, also from nothing.

The new quiver looked pretty much identical to the old one. The only difference was the slightly more delicate feathers on the arrows, along with the leather looking less worn and more high quality.

***[Enchanted Quiver (Uncommon)] - A quiver enchanted with the ability to conjure uncommon-rarity arrows when injected with mana.***

The description hadn't really changed at all. But then again, all Jake had hoped for was just to get arrows that were of higher quality, and hence more durable.

After the upgrade, the expected five dozen, or sixty arrows, were already conjured in the quiver. Jake took them out and examined them closely. The shaft was still made of wood, but Jake couldn't even bend it anymore. Before, he could easily snap them in half.

The arrowheads had experienced a big transformation too. They were still a type of broadhead but had changed to a curved broadhead type. The difference was also that the cross-shaped tip had been altered to be flat.

Jake remembered that these arrows were classically used in hunting big game, such as deer or boars. Throughout his life doing archery, Jake had mostly used bullet-type arrows, where the shape of the arrowhead was similar to that of a bullet.

That type of arrows, however, also had the issue of leaving a wound like a bullet. Great penetrative force, but the injury would be small, and blood-loss lessened as the arrow itself would plug up the hole.

The bullet-type was the best design to penetrate an animal's skin, but each shot's damage would be reduced. The build did make them far more durable and less likely to bend and break when striking something. Against armor, it was also often the best type, unless one used special armor-penetrating arrows. However, those would usually be too unwieldy to handle during everyday use.

The cross-shaped arrowheads that he had before possessed the opposite problem. The arrowhead on those would often break as the arrow attempted to create a too big wound, which was especially challenging when it had to go through hide and fur or other tough materials.

Against armor, they were often worse as the small tip was thin and sharp, making it easily deflected whenever hitting with a less than perfect angle.

The new design of the arrowheads was a middle-point between these. It was single-sided, making it much like stabbing someone with a knife. The tips were also razor-sharp, easily cutting into Jake's finger when he tried to test it.

Before, he had to put a bit of pressure on his hand while grasping the arrows to draw blood. Now he only had to press a tiny bit before it penetrated the skin. This would make applying poison with Blood of the Malefic Viper far easier.

Jake knew that this kind of arrow was far more suitable for what he wanted. It was a tool for cutting, not a tool for substantial impacts. The likely cause of death from these arrows would be hemorrhage compared to bullet-types where the kill often came due to a vital organ being penetrated.

Which was perfect for Jake. His main goal was to draw blood to inflict opponents with his poison.

This also meant that it was finally time to bring out the hemotoxins against more powerful opponents. His necrotic type poisons were clearly the deadliest; however, he had encountered beasts who could mostly negate it.

The giant buffalo was one such example. While a small part did rot away due to the poison, it quickly regenerated as the beast charged him. He had to channel Touch of the Malefic Viper for well over a minute before he finally overpowered the beast's strong vitality.

A hemotoxin would be far more effective at draining his opponent of vital energy. Most beasts didn't have high vitality, but this type of arrow would be far better for those who did.

Like a giddy child on Christmas, he got up and threw the new quiver over his shoulder. It was like getting a new toy. A toy made to inflict horrendous wounds and death upon others.



The valley was empty by now, forcing Jake to scale one of the two mountains surrounding it. Of the three volcanic-like mountains he could see, he chose the closest one. It was hard to climb these hollow mountains from the valley's mountainous paths surrounding it, but they were quite accessible from the valleys themselves.

He started running towards the closest uphill path leading towards the peak of one of the volcanos. The closest one also happened to be the smallest one, making Jake believe whatever was found there had a lower difficulty than the other two.

The mountain in the middle was far more giant compared to the other two he could see. As he ran up from the valley, he didn't encounter any beasts for a bit, until he finally met a small group of the multicolored elemental raptors.

Only three of them, and a quick Identify showed that they were only in their mid-forties. Lower level than many of the badgers, and far lower than the buffalo, which had been well into its fifties.

One of them was red, one of them brown, and the last one blue. They possessed the fire element, the earth element, and the ice/water element, respectively, based on his previous encounters with their type.

Not that it ultimately mattered. The raptors were far too weak in Jake's opinion to pose any threat. But they were perfect as targets to test out his new arrows.

Taking one out, he decided not to use any poison. Better to just test the use of the arrows without any other factors.

He decided to go with his usual strategy as he charged up a Powershot. He decided to go for a powerful one to test the durability of the arrows. After nearly ten seconds of charging, he released the arrow to the usual explosion of force as a wave of dust was kicked up all around him.

*Please don't break, please don't break,* Jake prayed as the arrow was released.

A prayer that was answered as the arrow smashed into the midsection of the Redhide Raptor. The arrow cut into its flesh like it was nothing, as it left a triangular wound. The wound itself was larger than the arrowhead due to the pure force behind the shot.

The arrow penetrated straight through the beast as it smashed into the ground, boring into the soil for nearly three meters before it stopped. The creature naturally screamed in pain as it fell down due to the force. It fell, but it wasn't dead.

After seeing their comrade fall down, the two other raptors turned their heads towards Jake as they screeched. Elemental energy gathered in their mouths as one of them spit out a shard of ice while the other fired out a stream of small sharp rocks, each with the power of a bullet fired from a modern automatic rifle.

It was fast, but at the same time, far too slow for Jake as he quickly dodged the assault from the two beasts with a quick sidestep as he counterattacked. His arm did itch a bit from the Powershot, but he nevertheless returned fire with a Splitting Arrow.

The arrow was fired from his bow as it mid-flight split into four, with three of them hitting the brown dinosaur.

He managed to get off another such splitting arrow before he had to dodge another shard of ice, followed by a stream of fire from the severely wounded Redhide Raptor that had managed to get back up once more.

The beast was severely weakened as the arrow without a doubt had torn through some essential organs. It would heal in time. If it had time.

Jake released a flurry of arrows towards the poor raptor as it was unable to dodge. The one which marked its end was one that penetrated through its hard skull and into its brain. Smiling in satisfaction at the sharpness of the arrows, he turned his attention back to the two remaining beasts.

Both were wounded by now and bleeding heavily from their wounds. It took only a few minutes to finish off the rest of them, as they exchanged a very uneven trade of projectiles. The raptors preferred to fight at a range, a trait Jake would gladly match.

***\*You have slain [Redhide Raptor lvl 44] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 48000 TP earned\****

***\*You have slain [Brownhide Raptor lvl 46] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 52000 TP earned\****

***\*You have slain [Bluehide Raptor lvl 46] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 52000 TP earned\****

Jake dismissed the notifications as he went through the results of his totally scientific test.

First of all, the arrows were sharp. VERY sharp. They were like magical razorblades as they cut through his opponent.

Secondly, they were durable. Far more so than the old ones. A great example was how one had managed to penetrate into the skull of one of the beasts. While it hadn't gone all the way through, it still managed to make its way through a lot of steel-hard bone.

The durability was also proven by how none of the arrows had broken. Even when they hit at an awkward angle or hit the ground, they still remained intact. The blades were dulled, but they were intact.

This increased sharpness was just what he had hoped for... but it did have some drawbacks.

With the old arrows, the beast would have been dead in the first Powershot... making Jake remember a valuable lesson in fundamental physics.

If an object is thin and sharp, it can easily penetrate an object, of course. Needles being a great example of this. However, the overall impact would be severely lessened.

It didn't matter as much in the old world, where destroying a vital organ would mean the opponent's death. After the system, losing a heart or even the brain didn't necessarily mean it was the end. Jake had fought plenty of beasts that had managed to keep going even with severe damage to their brains.

While they would lose control of their bodies and often just spasm with the brain unable to control the body... the passive vital energy remaining in the body would eventually heal the brain.

This meant that his new arrows actually dealt less damage than the old ones. It was often more effective to do just a large amount of overall damage than harm in a focused area.

His old common-rarity arrows worked very much like hollow-point bullets. They dealt far more damage to a surface area while not really having as powerful penetrative force when they exploded upon impact.

Of course, all this discounted one important detail... Jake didn't need to do a large amount of damage with his arrows. He had poisons for that. The most important thing for him was introducing whatever poison on the arrow into the bloodstream or flesh of his enemy.

Overall, he was delighted with his test. Perhaps he would still use the common-rarity arrows sometimes if he needed to kill weaker prey who would die to a single one of those arrows. Such as the raptor he had just faced. He still had a quiver of common-rarity in his spatial storage, after all.

*Oh well, time to continue*, Jake thought to himself as he continued his trek up the mountain. Hopefully, he would find prey that would truly allow his newfound equipment to shine.

## Chapter 64: Badger's Den

There was little in his way as he made his way up the path. He was traveling on a slightly elevated hill, with a valley on each side as he ran at a brisk pace. A pace that could easily have allowed him to overtake some cars.

The road was steep, but it seemed almost... unnaturally made. Jake didn't call it a road for no reason. It was clearly formed in a very deliberate way, being nearly flat ground, with not a single beast in the way. And if one needed more proof, it only became more apparent as he got closer to the peak, with the entire route being perfectly flat.

On the way, he also conjured new arrows to fill his newly upgraded quiver. To no surprise, the mana requirement per arrow was way higher than before, easily a tenfold increase. An increase of no consequence considering that wisdom still was his highest stat.

As he ran, he also carefully observed his surroundings. From his vantage point, he could now see the area far better. It was much like he expected, with a general setup of mountains and valleys.

There were five mountains - four off to the sides and one that was more massive than all the others in the middle. If Jake's game theory held, the strongest beasts would, without a doubt, be found around or within the big mountain in the center.

After taking a good look around, he noticed that the valleys surrounding the mountain he was approaching all had one thing in common: An overflow of badgers. He had already killed an incredible number inside the valley he cleared out, but it seems it was only a small portion of their total number. Not that Jake was afraid of hunting the creatures to extinction.

Besides, this entire tutorial wasn't really a sustainable eco-system to begin with. Sure, beasts were fighting and killing each other, but the scale at which they did it was far too low. Every single animal also seemed to be a carnivore, which was also weird considering the abundance of vegetation. Though considering how levels and the system worked, it made sense for pretty much any living being to focus on killing.

Deciding to pick up the pace, he started sprinting as he got closer and closer to the top. The path didn't reach all the way to the peak of the volcano-like mountain but ended a few hundred meters below. But as he got closer, he noticed a hole in the side of it.

More accurately, a cave. The entrance wasn't big, perhaps only allowing a small car through, but more than large enough for Jake to enter.

As he got within 25 meters or so of the cave, he came to a halt. Charging in didn't seem like the best idea, even with his Sphere of Perception and danger perception. He didn't feel any particular sense of danger at the cave entrance, and his intuition told him nothing was off.

To be safe, he prepared a few poisoned arrows. With an arrow at the ready, Jake slowly walked towards the cave entrance. He was perhaps overly cautious, but better safe than sorry.

As he got closer, his sphere naturally encompassed the cave and allowed him to see... nothing - just an ordinary damn cave leading into the mountain.

Not a single beast or any living thing for that matter, and It was honestly kind of anticlimactic. Yet Jake decided not to lower his guard anyway as he slowly walked through the entrance.

The cave led into a tunnel that gave Jake flashbacks to a certain mushroom-filled one. Of course, this one had no mushrooms, in fact, It didn't have any light-sources at all. But it didn't matter; it wasn't long enough to prevent Jake from seeing light at both ends.

Getting closer to the end, he noticed that it opened up to a vast circular space - the hollow inside of the mountain.

Walking through the entrance, he found himself on a crevice overlooking yet another hidden paradise.

Despite what he had predicted, below him was a small forest. Calling it a forest was maybe overdoing it as there were not even a hundred trees due to the limited size, but it did look very serene and beautiful. It was more of a small thicket or grove, really.



A brief scan didn't reveal any beasts, which did make Jake rather suspicious.

Jumping down, he started walking through the small patch of greenery. He did find a couple of herbs but nothing else worth noting. As he made his way towards the center, an object suddenly entered his sphere - an object that was all too familiar to him.

A door. The last time Jake had encountered such a door, it had changed his life quite drastically after all.

He didn't hesitate as he approached the wooden door. After placing his hand on it, a message appeared just like the time with the Challenge Dungeon.

***Tutorial Dungeon Discovered!***

***Dungeons throughout the universe offer groups and individuals a chance to pursue strength and treasures through exploring the pocket dimensions known as dungeons. This variant is only found within the Tutorials provided by the system to newly integrated races.***

***Requirements to enter: N/A***

***Requirements to enter met.***

***WARNING: Only 5 challengers allowed per party attempting the dungeon. Only one party allowed at a time. Note that dungeons can be entered and exited at your own discretion.***

***Enter Dungeon?***

***Y/N***

Reading the message, it quickly became clear to him that this wasn't the same type of dungeon as the Challenge Dungeon.

This one seemed far... kinder. It didn't warn Jake of imminent death, and it even allowed whoever entered to just waltz right out if the place didn't strike your fancy.

Which removed every last shred of doubt if he should enter or not. Accepting the prompt, he felt his vision shift for a few moments before Jake found himself within yet another cave. A few moments later, a new system message appeared.

***You have entered the dungeon: Badger's Den.***

***Objective: Defeat the Den Mother.***

Reading it, he nodded at the simplicity. *This dungeon seems more like the videogame kind*, he thought, as he looked around the cave.

The cave walls weren't made of stone, but earth and soil, making Jake believe that he was literally in a hole in the ground.

He saw several small weeds and such growing everywhere, and when he knelt, he could feel the soil's moisture. This place was completely different than the inner area, where most everything had a rocky texture.

Even the soil was filled with small rocks and pebbles everywhere. But the ground here was clean, pure earth, the kind any gardener would go crazy over to have in his garden.

He didn't see any movement so far in his sphere, but then again, it only showed a long narrow tunnel in front of him.

*The tutorial sure likes tunnels and caves*; he thought to himself as he started walking forward. He was also pleased to discover that he still had all his equipment and that his spatial storage worked as expected. After all, the challenge dungeon had taken all his weapons, making Jake slightly afraid this place would do the same. A pleasant surprise for sure.

After walking for less than a minute, the tunnel started expanding. First, only a little, and then a lot, until it completely opened up into a vast underground space. This is also where he finally had discovered what he had hoped to find: Beasts. More accurately, badgers.

They were all nicely allocated around the place in small groups of 4 to 6, as they mulled about in what seemed like a small pre-determined area.

At the back of the cavern, he saw a badger that was all on its lonesome. The badger was far bigger and more menacing than all the others. Its colors were no longer the same mix of brown and black, but completely black with spiky fur on its back that had a purple sheen at the end.

He started by identifying the badgers in the small groups and was a bit surprised at their levels.

#### **[Venomfang Badger – lvl 56]**

It was nearly 10 levels above the ones he usually encountered outside. The most powerful he had met had been level 52. But this one seemed to only be on the lower end as he identified a slightly larger one from the same group.

#### **[Venomfang Badger – lvl ??]**

It was at a level he couldn't identify, but his intuition told him it wasn't that much higher than the other one.

On a side note, he still wasn't sure exactly what the level range for his Identify was. After he had gotten both his profession and class, it had gone up to common-rarity, where it still was. That had allowed him to use Identify on humans and to identify far more items

than before, especially alchemical ones, likely also due to his Herbology and Toxicology skill.

But with levels, he was unsure. He hadn't been able to Identify the buffalo either, and now he couldn't Identify this badger.

Turning his gaze towards the big badger at the end, he noticed that the exit of this cave was located right behind it, meaning he would have to go through it if he wanted to proceed. He tried to also identify the badger, to some success.

**[Alpha Venomfang Badger – lvl ??]**

As expected, he couldn't see the level, though he could see the name – it was an Alpha. He could vaguely feel that while the beast was stronger than the others by far... it hadn't evolved to D-rank yet. He could only imagine the power-spike such an evolution would include.

The immediate increase of power from a beast evolving was far more than humans from what he could tell. The difference between a level 24 beast and one at 25 was massive. The latter could quickly kill several of the former.

For humans, however, it wasn't as big. Evolution did provide some immediate benefits but compared to beasts it could be considered minor.

He remembered when he got his level 25 race evolution; it didn't really change much. He did grow a few centimeters, but other than that, nothing really happened. He wasn't suddenly twice as strong and fast. But he did notice as time progressed that he adapted easier to his stats.

The difference for humans when evolving their race seemed to be more qualitative rather than quantitative. It didn't give a massive immediate stat increase, but was more gradual, as the stats provided by any evolved race or class was far more than before, with the race evolution just serving to build up the foundation for all those stat increases.

Of course, all this was discounting skills. Beasts tended to not really have many skills of note. They maybe had one or two, but that was it. The Venomfang Badgers, as an example, had venom on their fangs and... yeah, that was about it.

If he had to make a hypothesis, it was that beasts were more focused. He already knew that not all races possessed the same nine stats that he had. And even if they did, no one said it had to be as diversified as Jake's stats were.

If a beast didn't really require stats such as intelligence, wisdom, willpower, and even things such as perception as much as humans did, they would have far more energy left to focus purely on enhancing their body.

Of course, humans could do the same with their classes. Jake's own Ambitious Hunter being a great example as it only gave physical stats. However, his race provided a bonus to all stats, pretty much forcing a balanced approach to some extent.

When it came to skills, perhaps beasts also simply had passive ones, or maybe they just didn't really have many skills, to begin with. Jake only had two skills from his own race: Identify and Meditate, with the two others he had from external sources.

With the limited number of skills came little diversity in attack methods and strategy for beasts, which was likely for the best, seeing as beasts acted just like animals and used their instinct above all else, something a human didn't need to. Perhaps the most significant advantage of the more... enlightened races.

A bit hypocritical coming from Jake, who used his instincts and trusted his intuition far more than what any reasonable person should. But at least he also had his conscious mind to make tactical choices together with his instincts.

Taking out his bow, he took out one of the poisoned arrows he prepared before entering the dungeon and found that it still had the poison on it.

Due to Malefic Viper's Poison's passive effect, the toxicity of the arrow was still there. A nearly forgotten skill during his everyday fighting due to it merely doing its job passively, but incredibly valuable nevertheless.

Nocking the arrow, he fired a Powershot at the biggest of the badgers in the group he identified before. A total of 4 beasts were in the group, with only one being unidentifiable.

The arrow flew true as it struck the badger in the side of its head, penetrating into the brain. The poison was delivered directly into its brain, killing it nearly instantly. Or at least it wasn't getting up as it only lay there spasming on the ground.

This attack made all the other badgers perk up as they all turned towards him in an eerily simultaneous motion. A tendency they repeated as they all charged towards him in concert.

Nocking another poisoned arrow, he shot it towards the weakest one at level 56. The beast tried to dodge, but its forward momentum made it still get hit in the side where the arrow pierced straight through.

As the others were getting dangerously close by now, he Shadow Vaulted backward as he shot another arrow at the already wounded beast.

He repeated this vaulting tactic, firing an arrow, and then vaulting once more, as he slowly picked the beasts off one by one, kiting them easily.

The Shadow Vault seemed to confuse the beasts every time he used it, giving Jake perhaps half a second extra time per jump as the creatures took a bit to reorient themselves.

After a few minutes, two of the beasts were dead on the ground, with the remaining two now only limping after him. They had done an excellent job avoiding getting hit in their vital parts, often able to shift their position slightly to avoid him piercing their hearts or brains.

But in the end, it didn't truly matter. The poison worked its way through their system, slowly making them lose their lives.



As the final one dropped to the ground and the kill-notification came in, he also felt the level-ups' warm flow.

Checking the messages, he took notice of the levels of the beasts as well.

***\*You have slain [Venomfang Badger – lvl 60] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 80000 TP earned\****

***\*You have slain [Venomfang Badger – lvl 56] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 72000 TP earned\****

***\*You have slain [Venomfang Badger – lvl 57] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 74000 TP earned\****

***\*You have slain [Venomfang Badger – lvl 57] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 74000 TP earned\****

***\*'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 34 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points\****

***\*'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 40 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\****

The one he couldn't identify had been the one at 60, while he could identify the ones at 57. He was beginning to have a good idea of where the cutoff was, but he was still not entirely sure. Luckily, he had plenty of subjects to test on.

Looking out over the cave of badgers and the fact that a single group of the things had given him a level... this hunt was going to be very fruitful.

## Chapter 65: Chilling with badgers

Jake could feel that both his mana and stamina were reasonable despite the many Shadow Vaults. His quiver was also more than half-full making it unnecessary to reconjure more quite yet.

After he had poisoned a few more arrows, he set his sights on the next pack - four badgers, levels similar to the one he had just taken out.

With a Powershot, he once more took out the group's strongest, as he retreated to where he had fought the first group to not attract more beasts. He had to be a bit cautious for the last group and kite them in a circle, while he now had more space to use.

Minutes later, the beasts met their end, as Jake once more got a level. Quite honestly, this was too easy. His arrows were getting low, though, so he had to conjure some more. His stamina also began getting low, so he decided to take a quick break to stock up on arrows while restoring some stamina.

Said restoration happened through the consumption of a stamina potion, as he took a quick peek in his spatial storage and saw that his stock was getting low.

His consumption of stamina potions was quite insane. He used his skills liberally, making him consume a lot of stamina. That, coupled with him still not being all that practiced making the potions, made him have to drink one nearly every hour when it was off cooldown.

Deciding to extend his break a little, he retreated to the tunnel in which he had entered and sat down on the ground as he summoned his mixing bowl.

Following that, he took out some purified water and put it in the bowl, along with the Green Lavender and Evergreen Grass, as he prepared himself to make the stamina potions.

Placing his palm under it, he activated Alchemist's Flame, making the transparent flame spring forth. The water slowly heated up, as he used his other hand and small strings of mana to pick up the other ingredients as he started his brewing.

He always found alchemy relaxing. Even during the challenge dungeon where his life was on the line, he still enjoyed it. It was challenging and complex, yet immensely satisfying to create something. Jake had never really had any hobbies that led to any actual products, being far too into archery or games.

His job was the same, with most of his creations simply being documents and figures on a computer. He didn't count putting together a PowerPoint with a bunch of graphs and forecasts to be considered a worthwhile or satisfying creation.

But seeing herbs and water slowly turn into the desired color, and hearing the following message of his success was oh so satisfying, especially after struggling for a long time to make it correctly. He seriously doubted he would ever forget the first time he made a common-rarity Necrotic Poison.

Smiling to himself, he jumped into the work.

The hours passed by in the blink of an eye, as Jake sat there absorbed in his alchemy.

The dungeon around him was silent, the badgers simply milling about, sniffing the ground and sometimes bumping into each other. The Alpha was just sleeping, as it seemed to be waiting for a challenger to appear before it.

Only four groups of badgers remained. One of them had four members like those he had already taken down, while two of the others had five, and the last one six. By how they were placed, it seemed apparent that you should fight them in order of least to most, ending up against the Alpha at the end.

*Just like a goddamn game*, Jake sighed as he started packing up the unused materials and threw the stamina potions he had made into his spatial storage, but not before taking one and chugging it down. Interestingly enough, newly created potions tasted exactly the same as older ones, making Jake briefly wonder if potions had expiration dates.

He didn't get a level despite hours passing, but he hadn't expected to either. While his leveling speed was likely monstrous compared to many others with their professions, it was a slow and arduous process compared to leveling his class.

A single fight lasting only minutes could earn him a level in his class, while he could easily do alchemy for an entire day without seeing a level-up, especially not when he was trying out new recipes.

Of course, professions were way safer to level. Jake was in no danger while doing alchemy, and that was even with Jake's profession being one with relatively high levels of risk due to the focus on using potent toxins. But compared to fighting beasts, the danger was negligible.

It had to be noted though that Jake was in relatively little danger during his fights, in large part due to his profession providing him a very high amount of vitality and toughness, making him far more durable than any agility-based class should ever be at his level. Coupled with the many race levels, it wasn't that surprising that he could easily face beasts many levels above his own.

Having finished cleaning everything up, he dismissed all distracting thoughts as he locked onto the next group of badgers. Four of them once again.

The battle went as one would expect, with Jake easily managing to kite them back and kill them one by one. He was exceptionally well-matched against them, making it an easy undertaking.

Three groups were now dead, with not a single one of them even touching the edges of his cloak.

He didn't get a level from the last group, but luckily there were many enemies left.

The next group with five badgers proved to be a bit more annoying than the others. The extra beast allowed them to slowly gain ground on him until he was forced to meet the final one in melee. He ended up getting a nasty bite on his arm when he was forced to block its attacks.

His attacker, however, didn't fare much better as Jake used an arrow to stab the beast repeatedly while holding it down, with it becoming a battle of attrition. Perhaps the badger had hoped that the potent venom within its teeth would take out Jake before it succumbed to his attacks. A hope that swiftly died as Jake got the notification of the kill.

To his surprise, though, he hadn't been able to neutralize the venom entirely through his Palate of the Malefic Viper. He felt a slight burning sensation in his arm as the poison struggled to travel through his veins. His health was also dropping little by little as his vital energy slowly fought off said venom.

The skill clearly increased his resistance still, as he could feel the venom's toxic potency through his Sense of the Malefic Viper. In terms of pure toxicity, it was on par with his infused blood.

He was a bit lucky though that the beasts didn't have any resistance to poison themselves. Nothing of note, at least. Which wasn't that surprising as many animals usually didn't even have resistance to their own toxins.

For example, a snake would be poisoned if bitten by another venomous snake of the same species, or even if it bit itself. Their venom was protein-based, which meant that while they could easily eat prey they had killed with their poison, the same venom would still be deadly if injected into themselves.

It being protein-based means that the stomach could break it down and absorb it, making drinking snake venom not actually dangerous under most circumstances. If you didn't have any open wounds in your mouth, throat, or stomach, that is. However, it is still not recommended to drink venom under any circumstances.

And based on the venom these badgers possessed, it seemed to be of the same kind as snake venom. Of course, one had to factor in the system and possible magic elements involved. Jake could feel traces of inner energy within the toxin, making it not purely a physical substance.

The same was true for all of Jake's own poisons. His blood and concocted poisons both. His blood being mana-based was quite self-evident, considering it was quite literally mana-injected blood. The ingredients used in poison concoction were also all filled with mana, making the poisons made from them also inherently filled with mana.

Jake wondered how a poison from before the system would fare against his current body. He remembered certain animals being absolutely ridiculously poisonous, being able to kill giant animals with even a drop of their venom or poison.

Perhaps the toxin would be far less effective due to all the magical mumbo-jumbo going on. Taking the venom currently being eradicated in Jake's arm into consideration, he could only imagine how easily non-magical venom would succumb.

Not that there was any way to know in the end. The system was here, and it was likely going to stay.

After less than a minute, he had finally removed the final trace of venom in his arm, as he noticed that it had managed to take less than 1/20 of his total health.

Looking at his notifications quickly, he saw that he had gained another level in his class.

***\*'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 36 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points\****

***\*'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 41 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\****

Honestly, this speed was ridiculous. But then again, he was a level 35 hunter killing beasts around level 60. Additionally, he had the Big Game Hunter skill, which helped him close the stat-gap by quite a lot. Noticing his class also reaching level 36, he slapped himself on his forehead as he admonished himself.

Why the hell had he used an arrow to stab the badger? He could finally use his new sword!



Taking it out, he instantly injected mana and felt that unlike the rare Greatsword of Nature, this one didn't reject him at all but smoothly absorbed his mana. He immediately felt the faint connection and became aware of how exactly its Invading Chill ability worked.

***[Shortsword of Icy Winds (Uncommon)] – A Sword made out of Froststeel and amplified with Ice-affinity mana over a long time. Due to the material used, the blade afflicts anyone hit with the elemental energy of frost. Enchantments: Invading Chill.***

***Requirements: Lvl 35+ in any class.***

It wasn't that unlike a poison, but if compared to toxins that had some physical parts to them, this affliction was entirely magical.

As the blade was now bound to him, the enchantments and power within also activated as its edge chilled - a frosty layer covered the metal as it started giving off traces of vapor.

He had tried to use the sword before he reached level 35 and found that he couldn't inject his mana into it at all. As for wielding it without binding it to himself, that too was impossible as the blade just wouldn't sit right in his hand. It was a weird feeling, but it felt like if he tried to attack anything with it, it wouldn't be as sharp as it should either.

He had forgotten actually to test if the theory was correct, but perhaps that was another experiment for another time.

What was important right now was that he finally had a proper melee weapon once more. He had found a common-rarity dagger in the valley before, meaning he could now duel-wield it together with the shortsword.

Taking out the dagger, which he had bound to himself when he found it, he started swinging them around to test how it felt.

To his satisfaction, he felt that Twin Fang Style indeed did work with the shortsword, making him not lose out on the stat effectiveness bonuses from the skill. He naturally still didn't get the "weapon of bone" bonus, but hey, what can you do?

He decided to put the two weapons back in his storage as he quite frankly didn't have confidence in beating those badgers purely using melee. One of the reasons he could handle them so easily was that he always killed one before the fight even began and then took them out.

However, being surrounded by five, all scratching and biting at him... yeah, he wasn't going to do that. The damn things were also too damn big, reaching up to his chest. If they stood on their hind legs, they would be more than three meters tall, being by far the largest badgers he had encountered so far.

Of course, the Alpha was even more prominent - the size of a large horse, with far more bulk and presence due to its spiky hide. He couldn't help but get a bit excited at the prospect of fighting it... but first, he had to get rid of the last three groups.

Checking his stuff, he was a bit low on arrows... but he didn't feel like reconjuring more yet, so he decided to make it an excellent excuse also to do a bit of melee combat when he ran out.

The first Badger went down with the customary Powershot, with the next two dying to the kiting and Splitting Arrow combo. The last two had only taken minor injuries when they finally managed to pin him down.

With a bit of excitement, Jake took out his dagger and shortsword, as he used the sword to block the claw of the first badger. He felt himself getting pushed back, having a disadvantage in strength.

He barely had time to jump back as the other tried to bite him in the neck. He struggled to get a good foothold as the first one charged again, but this time Jake put the beast between himself and the neck-biting one, making it unable to jump him immediately.

Taking the opportunity, he blocked the claw with the dagger once more, as he stabbed the beast in its front, penetrating quite deeply until a bone stopped the blade.

The badger screeched as it seemed to go berserk, clawing and biting recklessly. An action that, sadly for the beast, only made the fight easier for Jake. The creature was stronger and slightly faster than himself, but also utterly predictable.

He landed a few more cuts on the beast while he dodged the other one, that was still desperately trying to bite him to pieces. The badger got slower and slower with every cut from the sword, the Invading Cold from the sword seeping into its muscles and making them stiffen. Finally, he got in close and landed a Touch of the Malefic Viper as he put his palm on the side of the beast's contorted face.

It's screeching only got louder as the poison slowly started rotting its face, as Jake Shadow Vaulted backward, no longer bothering with the thing. It was already dead. A prediction that proved right in only a few seconds as the poison spread to the brain.

The remaining badger didn't seem even the tiniest bit disturbed about the horrific death of its former comrade as it continued the frenzied assault.

A few minutes later, it met the same fate as Jake stabbed the sword into its heart after its movements also started getting stiff and sloppy.

Jake hadn't come out of the fight unscathed as his cloak was well and genuinely tattered, and he had several claw-marks all over his arms and chest. He had even been bitten once more, and on the same damn arm even. But the thrill of the fight made the pain irrelevant. The sword was sharp, and the icy affliction had done great work. It even made him think of perhaps concocting a nerve toxin to double up on the paralyzing effect.

However, the most important thing, for now, was yet another level.

***\*'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 37 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points\****

Two more groups and one big-ass badger left.

## Chapter 66: The Notorious B.I.G Badger

Jake focused on the threads of mana as he supplied mana through every one of them. One of them reached towards his battered cloak, which had been nearly completely destroyed, again, after the latest fight where he finally took down the last of the badger groups, leaving only the Alpha left.

The self-repair enchant on the cloak would repair it entirely over time, but if one were injecting mana, it would significantly speed up the process.

The second string went to his bracers that had taken quite the beating too. He had used them to block quite liberally, making them well and truly scratched up. One of them even had several bite holes in them from the two times he had been bitten.

The third string went to the empty quiver as he supplied mana to conjure more arrows. Yet another two were currently picking up a blue mushroom each as they slowly put it into the mixing bowl he was holding with his two hands.

If he was doing relatively easy concoctions or brews, he could do it with only one hand on the bowl, but it was more comfortable with two hands if he needed a bit finer control. And as he was currently making more Necrotic Poison, he needed both hands.

Of course, he made it a bit harder for himself by deploying mana strings and charging up or repairing his stuff.

But in the end, it turned out successful as he was met by the beautiful message confirming his successful concoction and finally getting that level-up.

***\*'DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 47 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\****

***\*'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 43 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\****

Along with that level, he had already gotten quite the gains from the dungeon. Jake had been there for 10 hours by now, as he had to take a break before fighting the second to last and final group of badgers.

He quickly burned through all 60 arrows in every one of those fights, as the damn things were relatively resilient and good at avoiding fatal injuries.

As it took a bit of time to reconjure the arrows, he also spent the time concocting a bit. He had decided to go all out against the Alpha Badger and use some of his limited supply of Necrotic Poison.

He was starting to run a bit low on blue mushrooms by now. He cursed himself for casually eating them out of habit in the period after leaving the challenge dungeon, but not as much as he cursed himself for not clearing out the long tunnel filled with them after exiting the challenge dungeon.

It was unlikely that he would return for them as... well... he kind of didn't know the way back. He was a hunter, sure, but that didn't mean that his sense of direction was that powerful. Besides, the damn forest in the outer zone looked the same all over, with nearly

no discernable landmarks. At least the inner area had huge mountains of different heights to orientate oneself quickly.

At least the dungeon was straight-forward. Quite literally, as there was only an opening at each end of the cave.

After he finished most of his preparations, he meditated for a few hours to fully restore himself. Only a single enemy remained in front of him, and from the feeling it gave off, the thing was stronger than anything he had ever faced before.

Exiting meditation, he took out the newly concocted bottle of Necrotic Poison, as he started dipping his arrows in it one by one. Leaving nothing up to chance, he dipped all sixty of them, making sure that he could give the beast a sufficient dosage of death.

After he was done, he put on the now fully repaired cloak and bracers. It was a bit weird how he retained the stats from the bracers even after removing them. Though his connection to them slowly worsened when he didn't have them on, so he assumed that if he took them off for too long, the stats would disappear.

Shifting his focus back on the huge Alpha Venomfang Badger, he noted that he still couldn't see its level even after his level-ups.

The Alpha was no longer sleeping but sitting on the ground, almost as if it was waiting for him. The moment he defeated the group with six badgers in it, the beast had woken up and moved to the position it was currently in. Likely by design, Jake noted.

*Still too damn videogame-like*, he sighed. It was kind of eerie how the beast could be only a hundred meters away from him on flat ground, and while he could clearly see it from here, it somehow didn't react to his presence at all.

The same was true for all the badgers. Jake could attack one group without any of the others bothering. They should clearly be able to both hear and see, and yet... nothing.

Outside it was a bit different, with the beasts roaming more, and while their range of perception was limited, the mere fact that they moved around made it more likely for someone to get into a fight accidentally.

His unintended engagement of the small dinos during his fight with the buffalo was a great example. He had kited it around as he usually did and accidentally moved too close to a bunch of the small buggers. The fact that their range of engagement was more extensive than his sphere of perception hadn't helped either.

But these badgers... he could easily encompass them with his sphere and still not pull them. It had to be noted that his sphere currently had a range of a bit over 20 meters. Heck, the fact that he could sit here in the dungeon and concoct poisons while they were only tens of meters away was just weird.

It worked to his advantage, though, so he wasn't going to complain that much.

As he stared down the giant badger in the distance, he took out an arrow from his quiver, nocked it, and took aim at the beast. It still didn't react as he started charging Powershot. He couldn't overdo it, as he doubted the creature would die in a single blow, and having a numb or even damaged arm wouldn't be advisable.



At the same time, it couldn't be too weak either. After 8 or so seconds, as Jake started to feel the soreness set in, he released the arrow to the usual explosion of energy.

He had aimed at the head of the beast, hoping for an easy one-shot. A hope that was quickly snuffed out as the beast reacted the moment he released the arrow. The otherwise dull eyes turned sharp, and the beast sprung into motion as it dodged to the side far faster than any other opponent Jake had faced before. It still managed to get scratched, but it was a surface-wound at best.

Despite it dodging his initial blow, Jake didn't get disappointed but instead felt excitement. This one was a worthy opponent. A good hunt. A challenge he would gladly face.

Taking out another arrow, he fired a Splitting Arrow that surprised the beast charging towards him.

Three of the five arrows hit as it dodged. But notably, it clearly purposefully avoided the original poisoned arrow.

Narrowing his eyes, Jake knew this beast, despite its prior demeanor, had sharp instincts.

He only had time to get off one more Splitting Arrows before the beast made it to him. It passed the 100-meter gap in only three or so seconds, putting most sportscars to shame with its monstrous acceleration. And this was even with the beast finding time to dodge the arrows on the way.

Jake Shadow Vaulted backward but didn't have time to fire another arrow before the beast was upon him once more. His tactic of briefly confusing his enemy by vaulting clearly not working on this one.

He still hadn't managed to properly land any poisoned arrows on the beast, as he was forced to block a swipe of its claws. Its strength outclassed Jake by far, and right before it hit him, he leaped backward, borrowing the momentum of its blow to create some distance.

However, the claw still tore into his bracers and arms, but besides that, he handled the blow relatively well. He felt his bones creak a bit, and it did send reverberations up his arms, but his body could take it.

Having gotten some distance, Jake finally managed to land an arrow on the beast, though not hitting any critical areas, but it was enough to deliver the toxic payload.

The arrow pierced its entire arrowhead into the hide of the beast, notably less than with the normal Venomfang badgers, where they either went straight through or only stopped when hitting bone or dense muscles.

But it was fine. As long as the arrow could penetrate the tough hide of the beast, he could kill it.

The beast itself also seemed to notice the poison's effects as it screeched in anger, far louder than even the Molerat Screechers had. His ears were ringing, and he felt his vision

go black for a second. However, his danger sense still warned him of the maw of the beast descending upon him, allowing him to Shadow Vault to the side and avoid the danger.

He had no intention of letting the beast sink its fangs into him. He couldn't nullify the effect of the venom of the smaller ones, so he saw no chance with the Alpha. No reason to turn this into a battle of attrition.

Shadow Vaulting once more right after the first allowed him to get a bit more distance, as he noticed the beast behind him scratching at the wound he had inflicted. To his horror, he saw it rip out the piece of flesh where he had hit, along with the arrow itself.

*Shit*, Jake thought. The necrotic poison didn't really spread that well though blood... it broke down the flesh and spread through that. With the beast having ripped out the infected meat, it eliminated the majority of the infection.

*Gotta switch it up*, he decided as he pulled out a poison he had barely used. The very first type of poison he had ever made.

***[Weak Hemotoxic Poison (Inferior)] – Increases bleeding on infected entities and makes any injuries harder to heal. The poison must be introduced directly into the bloodstream to have any effect.***

It was of a lower rarity and effect... but it would likely do well against this type of foe. It already had several bleeding wounds, including the one it had just given itself.

He could see the flesh writhing as it visibly started healing, so he had no time to hesitate.

Using the time he had been given by the beast ripping out the infected flesh, he took out an arrow and swiftly cleaned as much of the necrotic poison off it as he could with his cloak. Mixing poisons never ended well and would often make the effects worse.

With no time to carefully dip the arrow in the poison, he just poured it out over the arrow swiftly as he briefly made eye-contact with the beast out of the corner of his eyes. It was coming.

Forced to retreat once more, he chuckled the bottle towards the beast. Luckily the creature decided that the empty bottle was a major threat as it jumped to the side to avoid it, buying Jake even more time.

He only had one arrow prepared with the poison, and he didn't know if he would get time to make another. He had no confidence in facing the beast in a melee brawl. Not yet, at least. If he could weaken it significantly first, perhaps he would be able to.

But he needed to land this shot. Splitting Arrow had proved not to work, and a regular shot had a big chance of being dodged... he needed to get a short-channeled Powershot somehow off.

His experimentation with speeding up the channeling speed had been gradual. He could slightly do it now... but he didn't exactly have a tremendous rate of success. Either it was negligible, or it just made the skill fail as all the stored inner energy dispersed into nothingness.

*Tough times call for tough decisions*, he thought as he took the gamble. What better time to try something new and risky than in a battle of life and death?

Having decided on a plan, he decided to take advantage of the beast's fear of bottles. He had thousands of empty bottles for poison and potions still in his storage and was more than willing to toss a few at the thing.

Taking out a handful of bottles, he threw it at the once again charging Alpha Badger as it predictably dodged to the side.

Jake didn't even take time to see if the feint worked as he raised his bow with the hemotoxic arrow nocked.

Focusing all his perception inwards, he started the skill and tried to hasten the flow of stamina. He felt it speed up significantly as he willed it to, and he felt the energy enter his arms at a rate like never before - a rate that was far too unstable.

All the energy built up disappeared even faster than it had gathered, making Jake curse inwardly. The first part had been fine... but he couldn't finish it. It was too unstable. Too rushed, with the energy not being guided properly.

He didn't have time to try again, as the beast also switched up its tactic.

The needle-like hair on its back suddenly stood up straight as he screeched towards him once more, giving him the same nauseous feeling. And just like before, his danger sense warned him right after, while his Sphere of Perception made him aware of the nature of the threat.

Hundreds of small, thin, needle-sharp hairs were heading towards him at breakneck speed.

Having no other choice, he charged towards the needles, as he used his Shadow Vault to phase through them. In a less than positive turn of events, he found that the needles had quite a lot of energy infused in every one of them, making Jake lose more than a thousand mana as well as more health than he would have liked.

However, he didn't regret his choice as his hearing returned after the screech, and he heard the sizzling sound the needles made as they were embedded in the ground.

*Venomfang, my ass, should be called Venomhair*, he cursed jokingly in his mind as now found himself closer to the beast than he would like. Despite the danger, he had to admit that he was very much enjoying himself.

With only five or so meters between them, the beast took its chance to snap at him, making Jake sidestep the blow, as he swiftly pulled out his sword and stabbed it into the side of the beast's head, penetrating the chin.

It reacted quickly as he was swiftly knocked back by the beast swinging its head. To make matters worse, the Alpha had managed to scratch his chest with one of its fangs during the motion.

He instantly felt the pain spread throughout his chest as the venom started taking hold. He subconsciously mobilized his vital energy to better fight it off as he looked in the direction of the beast trying to get the sword out of its chin. He had bought some time.

He had dropped his bow but had made sure to keep hold of the arrow. He still had his old bow from before he got the one upgraded to common-rarity. It was weaker, but if he infused mana into it, he should be able to make it hold together long enough to...

Something clicked in his mind at that moment. His control of inner energy was weak... but his mana control was far better, practiced through his alchemy, and helped along by his talent in it. If he could use mana to support the process... he could do it.

Mana couldn't be directly injected into the body in its pure form, but it could be manifested in the air and injected into non-living physical things, such as his bow.

Raising his old bow, he nocked the arrow in an almost trance-like state as the beast still thrashed around, trying to get the sword out of its chin. The Invading Chill was slowly seeping into it, annoying it more than doing any actual damage.

He began using Powershot as the process started as usual. However, this time, he tried speeding up the channel as he also injected mana into the bow simultaneously. The bow and his muscles were overwhelmed with energy in moments, but this time the inner energy didn't disperse.

The mana in and surrounding the bow held it in place as it reached equilibrium. The energy began building up like never before till it reached the crescendo. Having no time to waste, Jake released the string, as both the mana and inner energy flooded outwards, creating an explosion, unlike any Powershot he had ever done before.

The bow exploded into splinters when he released the string, unable to sustain its form after the mana had ravaged it from within.

He saw the notification pop up in front of him the second the arrow was released as it flew towards the beast that didn't even have time to react.

**\*Skill Upgraded\*:[*Powershot (Uncommon)*] -->[*Infused Powershot (Rare)*]**

## Chapter 67: Infused Powershot

The newly gained Infused Powershot shot the arrow at an unprecedented speed as it hit the Alpha Venomfang Badger right in its midsection. The powerful attack tore straight through the beast's body as it exited out the other way, piercing any vital organ in the way.

Jake was overjoyed at his method working and wanted to read through the notification with the upgraded skill, but was quickly brought back to reality by the Alpha's mad roar, as it charged towards him with reckless abandon.



He quickly realized the gravity of the situation as he was forced to jump to the side to avoid its mad charge.

His bow had broken upon releasing the arrow, his sword was still hanging from the beast's chin, as it seemed to have gotten stuck on something, and his other bow had been thrown who-knows-where after the mad rampage of the creature.

But he did have one big thing going for him in the big hole torn straight through the creature, coupled with the wounds left behind by a few arrows and the piece of flesh it had torn off itself. Instead of the bleeding stopping from these wounds, it had now started again, the hemotoxin doing its work.

The beast was also no longer as bright as before. The Infused Powershot seemed to have thoroughly enraged it, making it thrash around uncontrollably. However, the large movements only served to worsen its wounds.

A problem for Jake, though, was his inability to capitalize on the situation further. He didn't have a bow nor a sword, and trying to stab it with arrows or his dagger in melee didn't seem like a good idea either. So, he went with perhaps the most boring approach and kited it around, letting blood-loss do the job for him.

After running around for a few minutes, he finally found his bow as it appeared in his sphere. With it in hand, he could continue to land potshots on the beast whenever an opportunity presented itself. These arrows were the ones soaked with Necrotic Poison, making them all the more deadly.

In an attempt to take less damage, the beast ended up taking more as it ripped out all the poisoned arrows shortly after they hit it. Huge chunks of flesh were torn out, but the

Alpha could not regenerate as every last shred of vitality was spent trying not to succumb to blood loss.

The badger started getting slower as pools of blood soaked into the already moist soil. Its screeches got less intense as it got weaker and weaker.

This naturally only made it easier for Jake to do more and more damage to the beast, making the conclusion of their fight inevitable.

Finally, the beast fell on the ground after Jake landed an arrow on one of its legs. It still tried to crawl forward, but with it barely moving, he safely finished it off by finally landing an arrow in its eyes, penetrating into the skull.

With a breath of relief, he looked at the dead beast. It had been the strongest enemy he had ever faced by far. The fight had given him a feeling he had missed for a long time. Everything had been too easy after he exited the challenge dungeon.

He didn't count the ambush by Richard as that wasn't a fight but a one-sided attack. A battle he didn't even want to have, based on false pretenses. That time had only been about escaping... he hadn't been in the right headspace, but if it ever happened again... no, he would never allow himself to be so stupid as to land in such a situation a second time. And if he was, he wanted just to be strong enough to dominate the opposition.

To do that, Jake needed to challenge himself and improve, but every other fight had just been too simple. Jake had barely taken damage in most of them, and both his stamina and mana rarely took a hit.

A few good fights had been here and there, but nothing to really stroke his desire for a real challenge. But now, he had finally gotten one. It was a satisfying feeling, to be sure.

Looking at his notifications, he got a level, but what he instead focused on was his surprise at the badger level.

***\*You have slain [Alpha Venomfang Badger – lvl 71] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 102000 TP earned\****

***\*' DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 40 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points\****

Only 71, he thought, as he double-checked. That seemed way too low. Several badgers had been in their 60's and were so much weaker. He trusted the instincts that told him the beast hadn't evolved to D-grade but was still E-grade like him.

Then again... it did kind of make sense. The race of the beast was different. A variant, like how he could have gotten a worse class or profession, so could one perhaps get worse races. Or maybe only beasts could, as Jake was unsure if humans could somehow evolve into something... not human.

He couldn't help but remember the Malefic Viper. He had once been a snake, a beast of some sort. But he had transformed to become a dragon, and even now, he had the form of

a scaled, very human-looking man. Several considerable changes to his race appeared through that line of evolution, though always keeping the reptilian theme. For him to have had several variant races throughout that journey could only be expected.

Perhaps these badgers were the same. Variants appeared among them, providing better stats and skills. It would certainly explain why a level-gap of only a ten or so between badgers could mean so much.

An explanation he was sure to get in the future. For now, however, he had plenty of things to do.

The first thing he did was to retrieve his sword from the mouth of the beast. It took quite a bit of work to get it free, as it had been stuck between two teeth, and the creature had only made it worse as it tried to get it out, pressing it down into the flesh. Painful, to say the least.

Luckily the blade itself was fine. Jake had feared that it would be damaged, and as it didn't possess the repair enchantment, he would have no way of fixing it.

Next, he looked back at the notifications list and saw the new and improved Infused Powershot.

***[Infused Powershot (Rare)] – Stamina as fuel - mana as a guide. Unlike a normal Powershot, the Infused Powershot does not require a long charging time but can be charged in a brief moment. The higher the magnitude of the charge, the greater the stamina and mana expenditure. Charging Infused Powershot may empower the skill further. Adds a small bonus to the effect of agility, strength, and intelligence when using Infused Powershot.***

He was thrilled that the system had recognized his attempt and given him a new skill. He could feel the system helping him there towards the end, though it was only slightly. Honestly, he did most of it on a whim, somehow applying techniques he mainly used when doing alchemy.

As for the new skill, it was quite an improvement. It had been improved from Uncommon to Rare-rarity, and the charging time had been nearly removed. The scaling of the skill also now included intelligence, making Jake happy to finally use the stat. Well, he did have Touch of the Malefic Viper, but that skill required him to touch his opponent, making it quite hard to use against opponents like the Alpha that could rip him apart in melee.

His Alchemist of the Malefic Viper provided him 2 intelligence per level, while he also got 2 for every race level-up, giving him a total of 150 intelligence currently. It was his lowest stat by quite a bit, but he was happy that it finally had some use, at least.

Though he had to admit that the stat likely brought benefits he was unaware of. It was one of the big three mental stats, the others being wisdom and willpower, so it had to do something. Willpower, as an example, increased his mana regeneration, while his wisdom, of course, increased his maximum mana. If he had to guess, then intelligence maybe had something to do with the potency of mana?

Nevertheless, it felt good to finally have the stat mentioned as providing bonuses to a skill.

Infused Powershot was also far more powerful than the old Powershot. Or, the potential for it to be powerful was higher. Powershot relied solely on his stamina along with his physical body's ability to withstand the pent-up energy until he released it all in an explosion of might.

This new version used both mana and stamina. Now, the weapon was covered alongside Jake's body, making that also matter far more. The limiter on the amount of charged mana was the weapon used and Jake's ability to control the mana and stamina's equilibrium.

As an equilibrium was required, his limit of charged-up stamina was actually the same, as he had to use a corresponding amount of mana as stamina. The damage inflicted by overcharging the skill was also unchanged, though now it also risked breaking the weapon.

The skill's power was determined by the amount of mana and stamina combined, naturally making the skill far stronger. Though it wasn't a simple addition, making the power double. A fast shot without any charging time wasn't close to as strong as Jake's fully-charged Powershot before.

He could also feel that it wasn't like he couldn't do a Powershot like before, relying purely on stamina. He couldn't imagine many scenarios where he would do that, but he could. As for the final part of the skill...

This was where the system took entirely over and helped him. The release of the skill was entirely the system's doing, while Jake had only willed the way it was supposed to happen. How it managed to release the energy into the attack so perfectly was way, way above his pay-grade.

*If it works, it works, I guess,* Jake thought as he shrugged mentally. The system was a bit weird in many areas. Skills could clearly be unlocked or upgraded according to the user's actions, but he had yet to see any new skills being gained straight out. The option would just appear the next time you acquired the opportunity to unlock another skill.

Which, coincidentally, was very relevant currently as he had just hit level 40.

***\*Ambitious Hunter class skills available\****

With no reason to delay, he accepted the prompt to unlock a new skill, as the long list of selections appeared before him.

The usual suspects were still there, with all the weapon skills still clogging up the beginning, followed by all the skills he had passed over while still a regular archer.

At 30, he had considered Hunter's Tracking and Hunter's Trapping Expertise quite a bit but had ultimately passed them in favor of Splitting Arrow. A decision he didn't regret.

He could see many situations where they would be useful, but he just didn't really feel like they appealed to him yet. *Perhaps next time*, he told himself, knowing full well that another, more attractive option would likely also present itself next time.

The exciting part of the skills was always the newcomers, after all. Of which there were a few - the first one not really that exciting, though.

***[Infused Strike (Common)] – Sometimes, there is strength in simplicity. Charge a melee weapon with mana, striking for additional damage. Adds a minor bonus to the effect of intelligence and strength when using Infused Strike.***

This skill was just... yeah. Perhaps it could be useful, but Jake doubted it would be anywhere close as useful as many of his other options.

Besides, melee wasn't his first choice, to begin with. While he saw himself as somewhat competent at it, the goal was ultimately just to find an opportunity to create some distance and return to using his bow.

The creation of the additional skill option also helped confirm the precedent that he would more or less directly create these new options. He was pretty damn sure that Infused Strike came as a result of Infused Powershot.

Of course, he was sure there were more complicated reasons behind the system's way of unlocking skills.

He naturally wasn't going to with Infused Strike. The next skill option also made it a lot easier to rule it out.

***[Determination of the Ambitious Hunter (Rare)] – The Ambitious Hunter is not one to back down even in front of the most frightening foe. The mind a fortress, the hunter determined. Increases resistance to all mental and illusion based attacks. Increases resistance to suppressive effects. Adds a small bonus to the effect of Determination of the Ambitious Hunter based on willpower.***



A passive defensive skill. A rare one at that. The effects seemed okay, though not necessarily that useful for Jake's current situation.

He hadn't met much in the vein of mind manipulation yet. But the thought of it scared him to death. The mind was a complicated thing, and Jake didn't like the idea of it being manipulated the slightest.

Imagining someone controlling you without you, yourself, even being aware of it was just downright chilling. To be a willing puppet just because of some fucked-up skill. Most mental magic was not like that, though, he hoped.

Thinking back, perhaps the Molerat Screechers and even the Alpha had used some sort of mental attack with their screeches. The attacks were not merely physical but had energy mixed in, momentarily jolting his mind, throwing his senses for a loop.

Of course, he had been fine due to his bloodline abilities making him not rely on his usual senses. But it had still been a harrowing experience and the feeling of vertigo far from pleasant.

The skill also provided resistance against illusions and suppressing effects. Both also things Jake hadn't really encountered as far as he knew.

Quite honestly, he wasn't much into the skill. While he believed it would be instrumental during certain situations, for now, he needed something to make him stronger immediately. The reason for that being quite simple... the dungeon wasn't done yet.

He still had the objective of defeating the Den Mother. While he had slain an Alpha, the beast hadn't been the big baddie. The Den Mother was likely a beast even stronger than the Alpha, so he needed something to help him in the fight against it. Something the final skill without a doubt would.

***[Mark of the Ambitious Hunter (Rare)] – The prey is chosen, the hunt begins. Covertly mark a target, making you aware of their position at all times until the mark expires or is dispelled. All damage done to the marked target is increased. Additional bonus experience earned for slaying a marked target above your level. Adds a small bonus to the damage inflicted, the mark's duration, and the mark's subtlety based on perception.***

The first part of the skill that allowed him to know his prey's position was kind of irrelevant to him currently. He had yet to meet a beast that would run away or abandon a fight, forcing him to hunt after it. However, he could see it being useful if he ever did clash with an enemy who made a retreat, such as if he had been able to mark William back then.

No, the reason why he wanted this skill was due to the damage increasing effect. This was also his first time seeing a skill that said it straight-up increased damage done. It was always an "increase effect of stat" or something like that.

The skill scratched both his itches: Firstly, to earn more power and secondly to explore the system's intricacies.

It even had that final bonus experience earned for killing foes above his level to top it off. Such a bonus already existed for everyone based on the kill notifications, but he assumed this one would only increase that bonus. This effect likely came from the "ambitious" part

of the skill name, as it seemed pretty in line with his class's theme. Of course, this effect was also a first to see on a skill.

He didn't have much to think about as he accepted the skill and felt the information flood his brain. After a few moments, he knew exactly how to use the skill, just like the others.

Turning towards the cavern's exit, he walked past the Alpha as he gave it one last nod of approval, as a bit of excitement started building in his chest. The fight with the Den Mother was sure to be even more exhilarating.

## Chapter 68: Dungeon = Alchemy

By now, it was officially confirmed. The system loved long and annoying, pointless tunnels forcing you to walk for way longer than was reasonable.

He had been walking for thirty minutes by now. The light behind him was no longer visible, while he didn't see anything in front of him either. It was subtle, but the tunnel curved slightly, making it quite natural that he couldn't see either end.

The big cavern where he had fought the Alpha had been relatively well-lit by crystals covering the ceiling, but for some reason, the system hadn't bothered lighting the tunnels in any way.

Then again, the tunnels were made to look like the badgers had dug them out. Or maybe they had actually been dug out by them. Jake seriously doubted that with the rest of the dungeon being so obviously pre-designed, but who knows.

Luckily though, Jake had his own source of light. His Alchemical Flame, while a transparent flame, did give off quite a bit of light.

He didn't need the light for knowing where to go as he had his sphere, but because of what Jake was doing as he walked. A book was in one of his hands, illuminated by the flickering flame. The title read: **Blood & Poison: Intermediate Hemotoxins I**. Not exactly a bestseller, but Jake still found it incredibly interesting.

While the hemotoxic poisons had proved very useful against the Alpha, he still found it lacking, which was why he had decided to create a better version for his fight with the Den Mother.

The dungeon didn't have any time limit, so he saw no reason to rush through it recklessly. Then again, he wasn't going to dally around for no reason. Leveling his alchemy was, in Jake's opinion, just as important as his class, and crafting the hemotoxic poison was yet another worthwhile challenge. He was also getting close to his next skill from his profession, and he had a feeling the next one was going to be juicy.

Life and death battles weren't necessary to scratch his competitive itch and his instinct to challenge himself. The complex concoction-techniques and high requirements for precise mana control also did that.

So far, Jake had only ever created two poisons above inferior-grade. One was his necrotic poison, while the other was the rare amalgamation he had used to pass the challenge dungeon.

The necrotic poison he could make mainly due to his Palate of the Malefic Viper, combined with him eating far more blue mushrooms than he would ever admit to. As eating them gave him insight into their nature, he quickly got extremely familiar with them. And even with that, it still took him quite a while before he crafted his first one.

The amalgamation of poison couldn't really be considered a proper concoction. It had been unstable and would lose its effectiveness within a short time after being crafted, and even then, the effects were questionable at best. On top of that, Jake had used ten rare mushrooms for that one creation, not exactly being frugal with his ingredient-spending. Needless to say, it wasn't a feat he could easily replicate.

Which left him with his current challenge of making the hemotoxin he was currently aiming for. He had the ingredients for it already, still having them stored in his necklace.

He had gotten used to the spatial storage by now, but occasionally he was reminded of how impressive it actually was. The herbs stayed fresh within the necklace, just like they had in the garden found in the challenge dungeon. It was like walking around with a portable greenhouse frozen in temporal suspension.

Within that metaphorical greenhouse, he had also located the plant which he intended to use.

***[Bloodthorn Stalk (Common)] – A relatively common herb found in areas with an abundance of vitality-based creatures. It has a sweet smell, often attracting unwitting***

***animals. A significant amount of tainted vital energy is found within, agitating the blood of any living entity it touches.***

This stalk was, as the description said, not very rare. It grew by absorbing the blood of living beings who touched it. This was mainly done to animals thinking it was a beneficial herb and then attempting to eat it, only for the stalk to stay firmly rooted in the ground, scratching the inside of the beast's mouth and absorbing its blood.

The ground below these plants was often red, making many believe that the herb grew in blood-soaked soil. However, it was later discovered that the earth became red due to the Bloodthorn Stalk concentrating the vital energy into it to attract even more prey.

It was quite the insidious plant that had killed and maimed countless living things. Jake had even noticed the stalks starting to turn a bit withered moments after taking them out, forcing him to make a quick run back and pick up a few badger-corpses to feed the poor murder-stalks.

When he was back there, he also considered if he could use anything from the beasts' corpses to make any poisons. Sadly, his Sense of the Malefic Viper made it clear that their venom stopped working after their deaths. If Jake had to guess, it was due to the lack of internal energy. So he had just to use their corpses to feed the stalks.

On an important side note, they actually tasted pretty good. The herb had a lovely smell, with a lot of liquid within. The thorns were peeled off before he started his feasting, of course.

He ate plenty of them, as he familiarized himself with the herb before he would begin his practice. Interestingly enough, the stalks didn't restore any mana when he ate them but instead released a tiny amount of vital energy.

Thinking back, he hadn't really eaten anything worthwhile for a very long time. It wasn't that he no longer needed substance, but that he managed to keep himself fed only through herbs. He had a habit of eating a few of those he found as he roamed about.

*Wait... am I a vegan now?* he suddenly thought randomly. Well, a pretty shitty vegan, considering that he killed beasts all the time... but hey, he didn't eat them. Though he really should. Honestly, one can only blame the badgers for not looking appetizing.

As his thought wandered far from the book in his hand, he finally saw the other end of the long tunnel with his sphere. Picking up the pace slightly, he found himself in another cavern, about the same size as before.

Scanning the cave with his gaze, there were far fewer badgers, him seeing only five in total. The problem was the kind of badgers, however. Four of them were the same big badger, with the weird spiky hair.

**[Alpha Venomfang Badger – lvl ??]**

The only thing that soothed him slightly was the fact that they were all spread out. They all seemed to be very territorial, only staying within their designated area.

At the end of the room was a hill with yet another badger lying upon it. This one was quite different from any of the others.

It didn't have any spikes, but its hairs all seemed fine and smooth. It had white lines running across its sides in intricate patterns, looking quite beautiful, really. Its size was slightly larger than the Alphas. But more importantly,... it gave off a feeling that made Jake instantly aware that this beast was the real leader of this pack.

**[Den Mother – lvl ??]**

The beast was clearly stronger... but still not evolved yet. It was a great relief, as he had feared the creature to have been D-grade, something Jake had absolutely no confidence in facing.

All of the Alphas also felt only slightly stronger than the one had already killed. It was very slight, but it was there.

*Had he been thrown out of the main cavern or something?* Jake wondered. It was imperative to figure out the intricate lore of the badger cave, after all.

He had taken down one Alpha, and he had confidence in doing so with these ones. Sure, they were slightly stronger, but he had also gained quite a lot.

No, the problem was his current state. Ripped robe, punctured bracers, and all resources relatively low.



His first order of business was to get that in order, with the second being practicing his alchemy and killing the alphas. He knew it wasn't a 1-day project to finish the hemotoxin poison, so he decided to switch between alchemy and fighting, picking off the badgers one by one. If all went well, his poison should be ready for his clash with the Den Mother.

With no reason to sit around, he started getting to work on restoring his equipment and finishing his preparations for his first crafting attempt. He read the recipes, ate the herbs, and fixed his things over the next couple of hours.

With everything ready, he got started on the arduous process of crafting an entirely new poison. The differences between inferior-rarity and common-rarity weren't huge, but they were far from insignificant. The complexity required in the control of mana and the handling of the ingredients was at another level.

Purified Water, Aged Green Moss, Bloodthorn Stalk, as well as a good whiff of his own blood empowered with Blood of the Malefic Viper, and he was good to go. The first part went as expected, as he extracted the energy from the moss and integrated it with the water and his blood.

This part was the same as with necrotic poisons, making him experienced in it already, hence finishing that part without any issues. Next, he started applying the sweet nectar found within the Bloodthorn Stalks. You didn't need the stalk itself, but only the juices found within.

The highly concentrated liquid entered the mixing bowl with nothing unexpected happening. The juices and the rest of the mix acted like magnets with the same poles, pushing the other party away. But of course, Jake needed them to mix, and not just mix, but merge and bring out synergistic effects.

As he tried nudging them closer together, the small barrier that separated them unexpectedly broke apart, and the energies smashed together before Jake could even react. The entire concoction seemed to erupt as all the liquid flew into the air, splashing all over his clothes.

He managed to close his eyes and avoid getting anything into them, but his newly restored cloak wasn't so lucky. The acidic properties of his blood still lingered in the brew, making his cloak once more full of holes as small patches of it had eroded.

*That went well*, Jake thought to himself as he started restoring his cloak once more. He also had his skin hit, but his resistance and high toughness left him with nothing more than a few red marks.

What Jake had just experienced was a great example of why alchemists specializing in toxins had high vitality and toughness. The mixing process was far more dangerous than a regular potion, and even if the same thing had happened during the brewing of one, the eruption would only have left Jake covered in harmless liquids.

Of course, this was discounting that many alchemists who made poisons had to sometimes test and experiment with their toxins. And the best way to learn of the effect of poison was to experience it yourself. Jake hadn't done this yet, but then again, he hadn't really made that many different sorts of toxins. Though his one original creation *had* nearly killed him.

After his initial failure, he made a few more attempts, finding little but steady progress. No level was awarded for his efforts, still putting him at 47, but he wasn't discouraged. He drank one final health potion, topping up his health as he entered meditation to restore his stamina and mana.

Those two were relatively easy to restore. Mana continually regenerated, while stamina was restored whenever he meditated or slept. Health was another story. It did regenerate naturally, but at a rate far slower than the other two. He had lost quite a bit of health against the Alpha Venomfang Badger, and if he wanted to have that regenerate naturally, it would likely take days. He doubted even a week would be able to fill it.

Which was why he used health potions to top it off. Without those, his progress would be far slower as he would be forced to take far too long breaks. This was also the reason why healers were so essential to have when leveling.

Exiting meditation a few hours later, he checked his status menu, putting all his free points into perception. He had already done that with quite a lot of them before he had gotten Mark of the Ambitious Hunter, but now that he had that, it only confirmed his choice.

Looking over the status, he was very satisfied.

### **Status**

Name: Jake Thayne

Race: [Human (E) – lvl 43]

Class: [Ambitious Hunter – lvl 40]

Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper – lvl 47]

Health Points (HP): 3540/3540

Mana Points (MP): 3427/4210

Stamina: 1501/1890

### **Stats**

Strength: 231

Agility: 284

Endurance: 189

Vitality: 354

Toughness: 190

Wisdom: 421

Intelligence: 150

Perception: 493

Willpower: 224

Free points: 0

**Titles:** [Forerunner of the New World], [Bloodline Patriarch],[Holder of a Primordial's True Blessing], [Dungeoneer I], [Dungeon Pioneer I]

**Class Skills:** [Basic One-Handed Weapons (Inferior)], [Basic Stealth (Inferior)], [Advanced Archery (Common)], [Hunter's Sight (Uncommon)], [Basic Twin Fang Style (Uncommon)], [Basic Shadow Vault of Umbra (Uncommon)], [Splitting Arrow (Uncommon)] [Big Game Hunter (Rare)], [Infused Powershot (Rare)], [Mark of the Ambitious Hunter (Rare)]

**Profession Skills:** [Herbology (Common)], [Brew Potion (Common)], [Concoct Poison (Common)], [Alchemist's Purification (Common)], [Alchemical Flame (Common)], [Toxicology (Uncommon)], [Cultivate Toxin (Uncommon)], [Malefic Viper's Poison (Rare)], [Palate of the Malefic Viper (Rare)], [Touch of the Malefic Viper (Rare)], [Sense of the Malefic Viper (Rare)], [Blood of the Malefic Viper (Epic)]

**Blessing:** [True Blessing of the Malefic Viper (Blessing - True)]

**Race Skills:** [Endless Tongues of the Myriad Races (Unique)], [Identify (Common)], [Meditate (Common)], [Shroud of the Primordial (Divine)]

**Bloodline:** [Bloodline of the Primal Hunter (Bloodline Ability - Unique)]

The most significant growth was in his perception. He had gained nearly 150 points since he entered the dungeon with all the levels and his investment of free points. In reality, he had only invested 120 points or so, but the 25% bonus from his bloodline and title resulted in quite the increase.

And he could feel the increase. It was in minor things, like when he focused on an object, he could more easily make out small details, and when he focused on his hearing, he could hear even the smallest thing. It wasn't like perception just straight-up boosted one's senses, as it would be horrendously annoying if you had to listen to the sound of your own heart constantly. He had to focus on it, which means that it didn't help as much if he was distracted.

Where he could easily see the growth was with his sphere. With every point invested, it slightly increased in its area of effect and clarity. It wasn't by much, but it was there.

As for his danger sense and other things related to his bloodline... he had no idea if they even interacted with the stat to begin with. Then again, his bloodline was an intrinsic part of him. Would he even notice if they improved? Or would it not just feel utterly natural to him? As it, in a sense, was natural.

Closing his status menu once more, he briefly considered checking the tutorial panel but decided against it. Distractions would do him no good. In this dungeon, it was just him and a bunch of overgrown badgers, the rest of the survivors be damned.

He identified the first prey, taking out his bow, as he prepared an arrow with his old, weak hemotoxic poison. He had been sitting still for long enough, and it was time to do some light exercise with a bit of mortal combat.

## Chapter 69: Augur of Hope

Private tutors since he could barely walk, expensive private schools, and a support system surrounding him made up of the best money could buy. Graduated top of his class, got into the best university, and once more proved himself excellent, being at the top once more.

He had been in the papers, praised by everyone. But he had always tried not to let it get to his head. His father had been the “treat the janitor like the CEO”-type of person. His old man had even refused to hire him at his own company, telling him he had to go his own way.

Connections certainly had helped to begin with, but as he made his way into the corporate world, he once more excelled. At first, perhaps he was chosen because he was his father's son, but now Jacob was selected because he was the best man for the job. A mark of honor for him.

But this... this shitty place wasn't one where he excelled. This god-forsaken shithole called a tutorial wasn't anything he had ever trained for or even dreamed of.

And yet he had tried his best. He had tried to make sure they all survived, and all returned home. But he had failed time and time again. His colleagues died one by one, and he was powerless to help them. His hands shivered whenever he held a sword, and his mind went blank when a beast came at him. He felt useless.

Even where he was supposed to be skilled, he failed. He couldn't even help Jake, accidentally leading him into a trap and nearly getting him killed. His relationship with Caroline had soured after that. She had changed, perhaps in her own desperation. Jacob believed he could have still helped her, fixed their relationship, and gotten her back on the right path. Maybe it was a naive hope, but Jacob wanted to at least try.

*Could...* because even that he had fucked up. Not even something as basic as not parting without regret was possible for him. He had ignored Caroline when she left with Richard to attack the remnants of Hayden's camp. His last words had been "leave me alone," for fuck's sake.

Yet he tried again. Even after being broken, again and again, he got up. The tutorial counter was clear. Everyone was dead.



After they saw the number drop dramatically, the entire base had gathered. When the killing finally stopped, Jacob had done a headcount... and found every single person still living present, besides two.

Jacob had left together with Bertram to investigate what the hell had happened. What they found was pure mayhem. Corpses and shattered armor were strewn across a big area. They had called out for survivors, but silence had been their only answer.

They didn't have any healing potions or healers left... so even if they found someone, it was unsure if they could save the person. They hadn't stayed for long as Jacob had seen something that made him send Bertram back alone. Jacob stayed a while longer, contemplating what to do before he also returned.

Which led to the current situation. Jacob had done what he could to try and keep things running. But the situation was terrible. Everyone had lost friends or family in the battle, many even showing clear signs of having given up.

But he managed to keep them going. The two enigmatic survivors were a great boon there. No one knew who they were... which meant they could be anyone. Just that small shred of hope kept many going, and Jacob himself hoped that it was enough to ride out the rest of the tutorial. By then, hopefully, they could reunite with the rest of the world.

Jacob also hoped to return to the real world alive. He would fight, and he would survive.

But... Jacob knew who the two survivors were. He knew it was a false hope, but it was all he could offer them. On the battlefield, he had sent Bertram back because he spotted someone. It looked like a burnt corpse, but Jacob felt like he saw faint movement.

It was William. He was barely recognizable, but Jacob knew it was him. Jacob wasn't stupid and quickly put together everything that had happened, especially when he saw Caroline's metalized corpse.

William had killed them all.

And there he was. Unconscious and defenseless before him. With the starter-sword at his waist, he could kill him. Perhaps he *should* kill him.

Yet he turned and left.

Even after everything he had done... Jacob didn't wish to see him dead. Not because Jacob necessarily believed that William could be 'saved' or anything stupid like that. Jacob just didn't want to kill anyone.

Sitting down in the middle of the battlefield, he stared up into the sky. He truly hated this place, yet he refused to let it break him. Everyone was losing hope by the day, but Jacob felt responsible for keeping it alive.

Perhaps William would wake up before the tutorial was over... no, he would most certainly wake up and come to kill them all. *If that is fate... then let it be so.*

He had been stuck at level 24 for a long time in his class. A very long time compared to everyone else. The prompt had never appeared for him like everyone else. As the only person in the entire tutorial that he knew of, the evolution eluded him.

***\*Class Evolution available\****

He didn't know why it came. Why now of all times. He hadn't killed anything... he had just been sitting alone, staring into the artificial stars above.

Letting the system humor him, he accepted the evolution. But compared to what he expected, he wasn't met with a selection of classes. Many had reported having at least two, with some just being a big shift from their original class. But Jacob only saw a single one.

***Augur of Hope - When all is lost, most fall to their knees in defeat, but you became the shepherd to lead the lost. A hero to many, mentor to most, a guide to all. The Augur of Hope is a support class focused entirely on guiding and leading others. Your creed is not to fight; your fate to have others realize their destiny. How that is done is up to you. Stat bonuses per level: +8 Wis, +8 Will, +8 Vit, +8 Free Points***

He barely skimmed through the description before he just accepted it.

***\*The Holy Mother has invited you to her realm. Accept?\****

***\*Umbra has invited you to her realm. Accept?\****

***\*Rigoria the Maker has invited you to their realm. Accept?\****

***\*Yggdrasil has invited you to her realm. Accept?\****

***\*The Daofather has invited you to his realm. Accept?\****

***\*Camicus has invited you to his realm. Accept?\****

***\*The Eternal Servant has invited you to his realm. Accept?\****

***\*Autemius has invited you to their realm. Accept?\****

***\*Atlas has invited you to his realm. Accept?\****

***\*The Seeker has invited you to their realm. Accept?\****

...

Jacob instantly received what he could only classify as spam. Hundreds, no now it was thousands of 'invitations' appeared before him. Every single invitation was not as simple as a simple message, however.

All of them seemed to carry some kind of intent within. A faint hint of what the ones inviting Jacob were all about...

Once more, Jacob just took in the feeling of them... but he knew that he would pick the first one. An action, which immediately made his vision turn black, as his entire world shifted.

A blinding light appeared before him as he felt solid ground beneath his feet. With a startle, he looked around as his vision slowly returned to normal. He knew he had gotten many system messages before obtaining the class but didn't feel like now was the time or place to go through them.

He stood within a great hall. No, calling it *great* was an understatement. This place was beyond massive. He couldn't even see either end as he saw pillars shoot into the sky all around him, each larger than the most prominent building he had ever seen. There wasn't even a ceiling, but a layer of clouds which the pillars disappeared into.

As he marveled at the sight, he suddenly heard a voice behind him.

"Quite beautiful, is it not?"

Turning around, he saw... a woman. Which was all his brain registered as he stood there dumbstruck. He couldn't 'see' her per-se, yet he knew that he stared at perfection. A feeling of reverence welled up in his chest that he didn't even feel the slightest desire to quench.

After what felt like minutes, he barely managed to compose himself as he stammered: "Y... yeah... beautiful."

The woman waved her hand as a couch, and a table appeared before him. The table even had what seemed like newly-brewed tea just sitting there in a cup, ready to drink.

"Take a seat, Jacob," she said as she ushered him towards the couch.

Jacob didn't even think. He just did what she said and sat stiffly down on the couch. The woman herself sat on a chair on the other side of the table as she picked up her cup of tea and started drinking. She was showing no intention of addressing him.

"What happened?" Jacob finally asked, after taking a few more seconds to compose himself.

"I must thank you for accepting my invitation," she answered as she added. "As for why I invited you... there are many reasons."

“What reasons? And why does getting a class upgrade lead to me being invited here? I didn’t hear about this happening to the others?” Jacob answered, his curiosity now exceeding his wariness.

“So many questions,” The woman laughed as she nevertheless answered them. “You initially caught my eye due to your affiliation with the Savant, which only got amplified with your connection to the Viper’s Chosen. A Hunter, it would seem. As for why you are here... far from everyone has anything special happen during a class evolution, so it is normal for others not to speak of it. But know that you are not the first of your tutorial to have an encounter like this.

“Another major reason I chose you is that you have what I am looking for in my followers - a worthy shepherd, and one able to bring more light into the people’s hearts. Your class now is perfect for just that. As you no doubt know, any god would gladly invite an Augur into their fold.”

Jacob took a while to digest the information. Was he being recruited into a religion of some sort? Did he even have a choice? Was this entire thing happening a good or a bad thing? But more importantly...

“Who, or what is the Hunter and the Savant?”

“The Savant is of interest to a friend of old, and the Hunter roused the Viper. I can no longer see precisely who he is, no doubt due to the Viper’s interference, but he should be a friend of yours,” she answered calmly as if she had all the time in the world.

*Jake is the Hunter?* he thought instantly. This also confirmed that he was alive. Though Jacob had kind of expected that, to begin with. Jake had escaped after all, and based on what he had seen, the guy could handle himself.

But what was this about “rousing the Viper”? Did he do something? Was this the reason why he became so strong?

“What do you mean when you say that he roused the viper?” Jacob asked.

The woman looked like she was reminiscing for a bit before she began: “The Malefic Viper is who I speak of, an ancient being that has been around since the dawn of the system itself. After a tragic event, he secluded himself from the rest of the multiverse for many eras... but after your world’s integration, he has returned. And your friend is the one who made him leave that seclusion.”

“... is it a good or a bad thing that this Viper has returned?” Jacob asked, a bit confused.

“Time will tell,” she answered with a smile. “I hope it will bring good with it. On a personal note, I am happy to see him no longer mope around in that empty realm of his.”

Jacob nodded along, as he quite honestly didn’t get half of what was being said.

“This may be presumptuous of me to ask... but is me coming here a good or a bad thing?” he asked.



“You seem to care a lot about good or bad, Jacob.” She answered with a giggle. “It all depends on what you do with being here. But if you had to put it in a box, I would call it a good thing.”

“Okay,” he said as his brain kept trying to comprehend the situation he found himself in. Yet he didn’t question her judgment... he felt unable to question it. “Why did you bring me here, then?”

“I wish to offer you a gift as well as a responsibility,” The woman answered. “The gift; my blessing, the responsibility; to serve beneath me. To help spread my word to your universe.”

Jacob furrowed his brow at this. This did seem very much like some kind of religion. Jacob had never been the religious type, so he honestly wasn’t sure how to feel about the offer.

“May I ask what spreading your word entails and to who exactly we pray?” he asked, trying to learn what exactly he was getting himself into.

On the other hand, the woman couldn’t hold herself back from giggling once more, mesmerizing Jacob completely. He was very sure by now that her charm was in no way natural but magical of some kind.

“The word is easy. To serve me, and to serve the Holy Light. My teachings are hope, justice, and righteousness - of fairness and love for one another. Of the punishment of the wicked, and self-actualization to become the best one can be,” she answered.

Jacob began to come to a shocking realization. One that he quickly got confirmed.

“As to who we pray... well, I don’t personally pray to anyone. But my followers pray to me.”

“Are you... God?” Jacob asked in disbelief. Was this God?

“A god,” she corrected. “Do not be so shocked; we aren’t like the ones you had heard of before the system. We are very much tangible entities, and as you can see, one can even meet their god. Though it is rare. If you wander far enough on your path, you too can step into godhood, Jacob, even if the path is long. But if you follow me, I shall help set you upon this path, though your success or failure will be entirely up to yourself as well as fate.”

Jacob had to take a while once more to compose himself after the bombardment of information and shocking revelations.

“If you wish to join me, I will give you a blessing and send you back to the tutorial. Our time here is limited, after all. I can only hold you here for so long before the system drags you back,” she continued before Jacob could formulate a response.

“Wait, if you are a god, why can’t you stop the system? And what is the system to begin with? What does it want?” Jacob said, failing to hold back some of the many questions he was struggling with.

“I am not all-powerful. No one is. As to what the system is... well, that requires an answer longer than we have time for,” she said patiently, despite the seeming lack of time. “I understand that you struggle with the system as a concept... but from my experience, it truly doesn’t want anything. It is simply there. It is like asking what gravity wants or why light won’t stop being bright. If you truly wish to learn of the system, do so once you become powerful enough.”

Jacob nodded at the response, as it did kind of make sense. Enough sense for him to not want to think about it further, as that would just take him down another spiral of wandering thoughts.

“What does getting this blessing entail?” he asked, getting back on track.

“One can only ever hold a single blessing, bestowed upon them by a deity. As to what the blessing is... it depends on the god. But no matter what kind of blessing, it will open up paths, meaning more skills and evolution-options. As to what I want... we can talk about that next time.”

As she said that, Jacob felt himself slowly start to fade away.

“So, what is your answer?”

Gritting his teeth, Jacob decided to take the chance. Perhaps he was just falling for the woman’s unearthly charm, but he still decided to give it a shot.

“Yes!”

With that, she reached out her hand and slightly touched his still fading cheek. “Goodbye, my child. May you fulfill your destined purpose.”

And with those words, Jacob felt his vision spin once more, as he found himself back on the ground where he had disappeared from. It felt like hours had passed, but it had likely not even been an hour. Jacob even briefly considered if it had all been a hallucination until he checked his notifications.

***[Greater Blessing of the Holy Mother (Blessing – Greater)] – A worthy follower personally recognized by the Holy Mother. To become a speaker for the Primordial herself is a great privilege, given to few throughout the multiverse. Through the vestige of karma given to you, you have tapped into a bit of her holy power. +5% Intelligence, +5% Willpower. Grants access to many new paths. Only one blessing can be held at a time.***

This was the first one he saw, as he was taken aback. It even gave stats... though his stats were still meager currently, he knew it had to be significant later on. The other effect, such as opening up new paths, had to be related to those evolutions and skills that she... no, the Holy Mother, his Patron, spoke of.

But this was only the beginning as he had gotten quite the benefits.

Still sitting only a few meters from the nearly dead Savant, William, he went through all that had changed him, knowledge even entering his mind as he began going through all the notifications.

## Chapter 70: Excelling

Jacob felt a bit of excitement for the first time in quite a while reading his notifications. He had barely opened any of the system menus for weeks, and when he did, he only did so to either check the tutorial panel or his stamina. But now things had changed, as he had perhaps finally found a path for himself in this new world.

With the blessing, a title apparently also came. The only other title Jacob had besides the one they all started with. He had honestly kind of forgotten the existence of titles before that moment.

***[Holder of a Primordial's Greater Blessing] – Obtain the Greater blessing of a Primordial. In the vast multiverse, many gods exist, many pantheons rule, but the Primordial are few. To be blessed by a Primordial personally is a rarity, so bear it with pride. Grants the skill: [Lighthouse of the Holy Mother (Epic)]. +5 all stats, +5% to wisdom, willpower, and vitality.***

Another massive gain and another stat-increasing effect. They were even the same stats Jacob got a lot of from his class. As for the skill it granted, he wasn't too sure.

***[Lighthouse of the Holy Mother (Epic)] – A beacon amidst a sea of confusion. A light for all to follow in order to find safe shore once more. Allows you to take in emotions from those around you more easily, understanding their most profound inner desires. Passively makes you appear more trustworthy to those who have faith in you. The***

***effect of Lighthouse of the Holy Mother is based on wisdom and willpower, respectively.***

It sounded downright creepy - the perfect superweapon of any stalker. But from the perspective of a leader, it was invaluable. Morale and happy employees were the cornerstone of a highly efficient company, especially one focused on knowledge rather than physical labor.

Being able to convince others easier was also very helpful. It just rubbed Jacob the wrong way to imagine him quite literally mind-manipulating others into it. At least the skill appeared only to reinforce the trust others already had in him...

After the meeting, he had naturally also gotten the level... as well as a whole bunch of lost skills.

***\*' DING!' Class: [Augur of Hope] has reached level 25 - Stat points allocated, +8 free points\****

***\*Skill lost\*: [Strike (Common)]***

***\*Skill lost\*: Basic One-Handed Weapon (Inferior)***

***\*Skill Lost\*: Basic Two-Handed weapon (Inferior)***

***\*Skill Lost\*: Basic Sword & Shield (Inferior)***

***\*Skill Lost\*: Basic Throwing Weapons (Inferior)***

***\*Skill Lost\*: Balanced Approach (Common)***

***\*Skill Lost\*: Basic Blocking (Inferior)***

He had lost all of his skills but two. One called Amplify Voice, which did exactly what it sounds like. The other one was Motivating Presence, his only uncommon-skill before the events that had just transpired. It was a skill that reduced stamina expenditure for all allies around him.

But of course, he had also gained several skills. four to be exact - the first one a mana-affinity skill, something he had heard about before.

***\*Skill Gained\*: [Light Magic Affinity (Uncommon)] – The element of light is an affinity of two faces. The light can shine upon allies, bringing them comfort and strength, but also burn your enemies, along with a myriad of mystical techniques. Allows the user to turn their mana into the light-affinity. May you walk where darkness never reaches.***

This skill was relatively simple, except for the fact that it was uncommon-rarity. Jacob had heard that most affinity skills were of inferior-rarity, meaning Jacob had skipped a tier when getting it. When he tapped into his mind, he could vaguely feel small wisps of knowledge on how to use the light element. However, as he had no idea how to use mana and had no skills to use the affinity with, it didn't do much currently. At most, he could make himself glow...

The next skill was also a bit weird but had a fascinating effect.

***\*Skill Gained\*: [Shepherd of the Lost (Epic)] – The shepherd who leads the lost is the one who forges the path of all those he guides. Allows the user to more easily influence the Records and thus future paths of others. Enables your teaching to grant a very minor amount of class and profession-experience. Effect based on wisdom and willpower.***

He had no clue what all that influencing Records thing was about. No, what he cared about was the second to last part. Grant experience. He could help others gain levels without having to go through the horrors of fighting. The next skill was equally as cryptic in many ways.

***\*Skill Gained\* [Divination of the Augur (Epic)] – Fate is everchanging, but some can begin to understand the flow. Allows the Augur of Hope to peer into the rivers of fate and destiny to interpret the omens found within. The time between each available divination is based on the willpower and wisdom of the Augur.***

Was this skill some kind of fortune-telling? Prediction of the future? He had a feeling it was far more complicated than that. And the knowledge that came with the skill didn't



help him much either. It just allowed him to know how to start divining, and he knew that it was a rather lengthy process.

The final skill... was just downright weird and non-descriptive.

***\*Skill Gained\*: [One More Light (Legendary)] – When the lights flicker, your will remains. In the sky of a million stars, when one's time runs out, One More Light remains. The Augur of Hope cares when the light goes out, even when a moment is all that we are. So his light shall remain alit to further guide the lost and the fallen. The lights that have flickered out. Hope is not so easily slain.***

... it was a legendary skill. A tier Jacob had never even heard of before. He remembered Richard boasting about getting an epic-skill, making others green with envy. But now he had obtained a legendary skill... one he couldn't even understand himself.

The description was just so unbelievably vague. Whenever one gained a skill, one would generally get the basic knowledge of how to use it too. It was like that with all his other skills. But with this... he came up blank. It seemed to do nothing, and he had no idea how to activate it. Was the skill passive, maybe? But if so... what are its effects?

Jacob had no answer to that question. Even if he couldn't figure out, he had a feeling he would know what it was for in time.

He felt like he had been reborn. Like he had finally found a purpose, a path forward. One could live with the system without fighting. He could become someone leading people just like he had before. He could guide and help others.

Perhaps he had finally found a new area where he could excel once more.

Another person who excelled elsewhere was a man repeatably stabbing a massive beast in the side as it tried to wrestle him off. But the man didn't let up but kept holding on as his hands grasping unto the beast gave off a faint green glow.

The beast was already wounded all over, arrows sticking out of it everywhere, and a huge hole that had left one of its claws hanging limp. The blood was oozing out of every wound, and the sword was most certainly not helping with the situation.

Finally, the beast stopped moving, as its attacker received a notification.

***\*You have slain [Alpha Venomfang Badger - lvl 77] - Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 114000 TP earned\****

***\*' DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 44 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points\****

***\*' DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 46 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\****

Jake let go as he fell backward unto his back, a smile hanging on his lips. Not caring at all about the blood he had landed in.

More than half a day had been spent in this cavern since he entered. All the five Alpha's were finally dead, with only the Den Mother remaining.

He had gone through the cycle of preparing for battle, fighting a big-ass badger, doing alchemy, and meditating before rinsing and repeating. The common-rarity hemotoxic poison was still underway, but he was getting close. Really close. He had even managed to get another level under his belt with all the alchemy done.

In total, he had gotten four levels in his class, nearly getting one per Alpha. The second to last was the only one that hadn't awarded one. He didn't know if it was natural to get that many levels or if it was his Mark of the Ambitious Hunter showing its worth.

And oh, that Mark was great. Before, he sometimes had issues when he ran away if the beast briefly exited his sphere, but now he could feel where it was anyway, showing great synergy with his bloodline. The increased damage was also more than noticeable.

It didn't make his blade cut more, or his arrows dig deeper as he had expected. Instead, the effect was more peculiar. Whenever he hit a beast, dealing damage to it, what felt like a wave or maybe a small wisp of energy drifting out and consumed just a bit of health from the target. It was subtle but noticeable over a long fight.

And to make it all better, it even worked with his poisons. He could clearly see it being amplified, just straight-up allowing the toxins to drain more lifeforce than before. He had yet to try it properly with a potent dose of necrotic poison, but he could imagine the effects being very noteworthy.

In other words, the skill dealt damage directly to health points.

The badger he had killed the easiest was the second to last, coincidentally also the only one that didn't award him a level. His Infused Powershot had made all the fights a lot easier, allowing him to land an excellent blow to begin the battle with.

He had managed to hit it from the side and penetrate through the ear canal and into the beast's brain. The damage released from the Mark was insane, looking like a wave of energy washing over the creature. He said 'looking', but he was the only one who could notice the effect from what Jake could deduce.

Applying the mark to a target was also easier than he had feared. The skill said it 'covertly' applied it, and luckily that had turned out to be very much true. None of the badgers had shown the slightest reaction when he used the skill on them, merely continuing their daily lives of loafing about.

In the entire dungeon, only two living beings remained - the Den Mother and himself. He didn't know if he could defeat the beast. He had a feeling he *maybe* could, even without making the new poison. But he had already made the plan, so he decided to just stick with it.

Besides, he needed another period of restoration. He had rushed the fight with the final badger quite a bit, not bothering to fully reconjure all his arrows, which was why he had to face it in melee for a bit. An endeavor that had only ruined his clothing... again, again.

It had to be said that Jake looked like the poorest homeless person around. The other survivors had banded together, meaning they had tailors in their midst. Jake, on the other hand, had to make do with his own measly skills.

His cloak could be restored, but under that cloak... yeah. His chest was bare and had been so for the last many days. He had many clothes from within the Challenge Dungeon but had decided to stop wasting the shirts by now. Nearly all of them had been ripped apart, and as they were just regular clothes, he had no way to fix them.

He still wore pants, but even they were tattered and holed all over. He only switched them out when it was absolutely necessary, and even now, they were more shorts than pants.

And speaking of his chest... he had to admit that he looked good. Jake had always had a rather lithe figure, having to spend a lot of time to stay in shape for his archery. The habits of regular exercise and healthy eating had luckily stuck with him after the accident that stopped his pursuit of going pro.

His current body had gone through changes since entering the tutorial. All the belly fat was gone, his muscles light and flexible. The evolutions had even resulted in his height increasing by a few centimeters. He had been of a rather average size before, while now he could be considered a bit above average.

His face and hair had remained the same. His brown hair had perhaps grown a little, but it was hard to tell. The glint in his eye was a bit sharper than before, and perhaps his features had become a bit rougher on average. But it was hard telling if it was due to the system or all the hardships he had gone through.

Of course, his journey wasn't over yet. There was, for example, a giant badger to kill.

He decided to retreat to the cave entrance just in case the Den Mother unexpectedly made a move. He doubted it would, but better safe than sorry.

Taking out his ingredients, he got concocting. Purified water, infused blood, aged poisonous moss, Bloodthorn Stalk juices, and a shitload of mana later, and he was good to go.

His progress had been slow and steady over the last day. He had concocted many common-rarity necrotic poisons before and was no longer a rookie in the craft. In fact, he would say making that poison was easier than the inferior-rarity stamina potion.

The only part that still vexed him was the merging process of the two opposing elements for the Hemotoxin. They rejected each other, but he had started to find ways to slowly make them meld into one another and not explosively clash, spraying the concoction all over. After having it explode in his face far too many times, that is.

Which was also the reason why he wasn't wearing his cloak at the moment. His skin had better resistance to poison than his clothing, after all.

The beginning part of the process went as expected. The water, moss, and blood mixed well together, and soon the first part was finished. Adding the Stalk juices, however, Jake had started switching up the approach. Instead of adding it all at once, he would slowly drip it into the mix.

As the first drop hit, it started sizzling as Jake wasted no time forcing it to merge with the rest of the mix. It struggled at first, but slowly it started getting integrated. The concoction's nature started slowly changing as it got affected by the energy within the stalk.

One could compare it to the effect of a vaccine. Of course, the body would naturally reject what was injected into the body, attempting to crush it and push it out. If one increased the vaccine dose significantly, all one would achieve was to make the person sick. But with a small dosage, the body could get used to it, which was just like he was doing now.

The rest of the brew could slowly absorb a small amount of the Bloodthorn juices, and with Jake's careful guidance, not cause any adverse effects. This allowed Jake to soon put in another drop into the mix, and then another, and then another.

Soon more than half of the required liquid was in the mix, and it still remained stable. The last few drops not even showing any unstable reactions but merely integrating on its own.

With a bit of courage, he decided to put in the rest of the liquid all at once. The poison's purpose was ultimately for the Bloodthorn Stalk juices' hemotoxic properties to overpower the concoction and make it take on its effect. A bit of instability was, in other words, required for it to succeed.

Something, that to Jake's great relief, finally succeeded when he saw the mixture turn entirely red as well as the system notifications appearing.

***\*You have successfully crafted [Hemotoxic Poison (Common)] – A new kind of creation has been made. Bonus experience earned\****

***\*' DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 49 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\****